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Roman Karur

R. Nagaswamy

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Karur in Trichy district of Tamilnad has been yielding in recent times an astonishing number of antiquities especially coins and inscribed objects both in quantity and variety from the Amaravathi river bed. The learned Tamil Scholar Francois Gros of the Ecole Francais Extreme Orient, Pondicherry suggested that I study all the recent Karur finds and assess their archeological significance and the role of Karur in the history of Tamil civilization. This book is in response to that suggestion. I am thankful to Dr. Gros for his keen interest in the subject and also valuable suggestions when the work was under preparation.

As the work progressed, it was becoming increasingly clear that Roman presence in Tamilnad either by themselves or by the Egyptian Greek subjects of them, had left far more deeper impact on the economy, defense, arts and architecture than hitherto visualised.

The Tamil literature makes it abundantly clear that the Tamils admired the work and products of the Romans for their quality and in a number of cases started imitating them. The issue of portrait coins with the legend and head of the local roiers is a clear pointer in this direction. The portrayal of men and animals on the local coins suggest Roman hand, who are praised for their artistic skill. The second point that emerges from this study is that Karur in Trichy district was undoubtedly the capital of the Cheras of the Sangam age. The third and perhaps the most crucial point that stands out is the date of Sangam classics. As some of the coins bear the names of the Chera rulers whose names are found in the Sangam classics could be placed only after the establishment of Roman trade on an impressive scale. It seems to me that the time has come to enlarge the field of enquiry into other areas and assess the impact of the Romans. One thing seems to be clear that beginning from the royalty and the rich merchants, the quality of life of the people seems to have been enriched by this contact.

Karur, Vellalur and Thimkkoilur finds of Roman gold coins and jewellery are of great significance to this study. I have categorised and illustrated a number of coins from Karur and tried to indicate the changing technological trends in minting coins. I have taken this opportunity to outline briefly the history of Karur through the centuries from

different sources.

Sri Iravatham Mahadevan has been my close friend and a source of inspiration to me in the field of Tamil Brahmi studies. When the outstanding gold signet ring from Karur was found Mahadevan gave the photograph to me and encouraged me to write on its significance, instead of himself writing on it. It always reminds me of the Sangam chieftain Atiyaman who gifted the immortal fruit he obtained to the poetess Avvaiyar, instead of himself benefitting from it. I express my profound thanks to Sri Mahadevan for readily agreeing to my request and giving the foreword which reflects the historic association we had with the subject.

It is a pleasure and privilege to be intimately associated with Thim.R.Krishnamurthi of Dinamalar whose keen interest in the field of Numismatics, has brought to light several new finds. In fact his discoveries of the Chera coins Makkotai and Kuttuvan Kodai and Peruvuluti Pandya coin area land marks in South Indian numismatics. I am beholden to him for kindly permitting me to study some of his coins and also use some of the illustrations in this book.

Pollachi Vailal Dr.N.Mahalingam who has enriched Tamil literature, music and dance by his liberal patronage is a keen scholar in the field of ancient history and civilizations. I am ever thankful to him for his kind encouragements.

Dr.F.Grimmel, the Director, Ecole Francais Extreme Orient Pondicherry evinced deep interest in this study and it is my duty to thank him for the same.

My thanks are Also due to Thiru V.K.Rajamani, Madras, Thiru. Raman I.A.S., and Alakkudi Seetharaman who have permitted me to use some of their photographs in this book.

Four happy coincidences bring Karur studies closer to my heart. 1) I was the first to read the Satyaputra Atiyaman Neduman Anji inscription of Jambai which was first discovered by my student Thiru.Selvaraj. 2) I had the privilege of undertaking the first archaeological excavation at Karur as the then Director of Archaeology of Tamilnad State. 3) I brought to light for the first time the inscribed Chera coin Kollippurai and 4) The first Roman coin (of Valentine) was unearthed at Alagankulam in a stratified layer in the archeological excavation conducted under my direction, which is of immense archeological value for chronology. I present my studies as a participant in Karur

history.

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I

My emotional involvement with Karur began on the cool sunny afternoon of 1st February 1965, when I first climbed the Amnattar hill at Pugalur very near Karat, to have a close look at the Tamil-Brahmi inscriptions discovered there much earlier, but left unread as they were said to be 'mostly damaged' and 'as the rock was very much weather-beaten'. In the mellow light of the setting sun, the long four-line inscription engraved on the southern rock-face stood out; and it was not too difficult to make out the bold characters even though they had worn paper-thin over the centuries.

As I began spelling out aloud the names Ko Adan Cellimporai, Kadungo and (I)lango, I realised with utter astonishment that I was indeed looking at a Chera inscription of the Sangam Age. When I published it shortly thereafter (The Hindu, 7 March 1965). I wrote, perhaps a trifle too lyrically. "The Tamil kings of the Sangam Age have at last come into the lime light of history and archaeology from the twilight of fables and ballads". You will read in this volume Dr.Nagaswamy's analysis of the implications of this discovery for the chronology of the Sangam Age in general, and the history of Karur in particular.

II

Dr. Nagaswamy had a very similar experience years later when he was looking at the Jambai record of Atiyaman Nedamen Anci, one of the most celebrated heroes of the Sangam Age, and a contemporary of the Irumborai rulers of the Pugalur inscriptions. I can even now recall vividly his excited voice over the telephone one early morning in

October 1981 informing me about the telegram received from Selvaraj, his student, announcing the discovery of a Tamil Brahmi inscription at Jambai near Tirukkoyilur in South Arcot District, As Dr. Nagaswamy was rushing to the site I wished him god speed and remarked jocularly that he might have stumbled on an Asokan Rock Edict. As it turned out I was not too far off the mark. Dr. Nagaswamy did discover the title Satiyaputo at Jambai known earlier from the second Rock Edict of Asoka. This finding clinched once for all the identification of Satiyaputa with the Adiyamans of the Tamil Country.

There can hardly be any doubt that the Jambai record of Atiyaman Neduman Anci read by Dr. Nagaswamy is one of the most important epigraphical discoveries in Tamilnadu and ranks with those of the Chera inscriptions at Pugalur and Nedunjeliyan's inscriptions at Mangulam, all belonging to the Sangam Age. I was then working in the Indian Express. I invited Nagaswamy to contribute two articles explaining the significance of the discovery, one in English to be published in all the editions of the Indian Express (Indian Express, Sunday Magazine, 7 October 1981) and the other in Tamil (Dinamani 12 Oct, 1981). One would have thought that such a major discovery would have been hailed by Epigraphists. That is not what happened.

A whispering campaign through foot notes citing foot notes was set afoot casting doubts on the 'authenticity' of the Jambai inscription. How could a Sanskrit expression like Satiyaputo occur in a Tamil-Brahmi record? And why is the dental n used instead of the correct alveolar n in the inscription.?

Neither objections can stand scrutiny. Apart from the well-known occurrences of numerous Prakrit loan-words in the Tamil-Brahmi cave inscriptions discovered earlier (and published by me in the corpus of the Tamil-Brahmi Inscriptions in 1966 in a volume edited by Dr. Nagaswamy), we now have the Prakrit grammatical form Utayana-sa occurring in the newly-discovered Mettupatti inscription and a similar expression Peruvaluti-sa occurring in one of the bi-lingual coin legends on an early Pandyan coin. As regards the second objection, Tamil epigraphists know only too well that the use of the dental for the alveolar n is one of the commonest errors in Tamil inscriptions. The examples are too numerous to need citation.

I became so concerned with these unfair criticisms that I decided to visit the site once again for more detailed investigations. With the co-operation of the District Collector of South Arcot, I convened a meeting of Jambai on 14th December 1991, attended by the Tahsildar, the village revenue officials and some prominent citizens. The Tamilnadu State Department of Archaeology was represented by Thim. Kulandaivelan. (Dr.M.D.Sampath of the ASI, Epigraphy Branch, was to have attended, but got held up in Delhi). At this meeting, Appavu, the retired Talayah of the village listed that he took Selvaraj to see the inscription in 1981. Appavu had known the inscription since his boyhood as he used to take rest in the cavern when grazing his cattle nearby. Two other villagers also corroborated the testimony and stated that they had also often visited the cavern with the inscription. All the three volunteered to make sworn affidavits duly attested by the Revenue Officials.

And then the clinching evidence turned up. A Senior PWD Engineer who was present on the occasion, made arrangements to remove the top-soil from the two caverns situated opposite to each other. The cavern opposite with one with the inscription was found to have now rock-beds, a large broad one near the entrance and a smaller one in the middle of the cavern. The existence of the rock beds proves Jambai association with the Jambai caverns. This discovery I note, has given the final quietus to an avoidable controversy.

III

When I was serving as the Editor, Dinamani, Dr. Nagaswamy walked into my room one day in November 1987 with obvious excitement bringing with him the first known Chera coin with an inscription. The coin-legend reads Kol-i-p-purai in characters similm to those found in the Chera inscriptions at Pugalur. I was very happy with the discovery as it confirmed my earlier readings of the Chera names at Pugalur. (Where both the forms Porai and Purai are found). Dr. Nagaswamy's article describing the coin was immediately published (Dinamani, 15th November 1987). More recently some more inscribed coins of the Cheras of the Sangam Age have been found at Karur and Published by R.Krishnamurthy and A.Seetharaman. These finds are described by Dr. Nagaswamy in detail in this volume with critical assessments of their paleography and

chronology.

IV

At the South Indian Numismatic Conference held at Thanjavur in January 1991, a coin-dealer from Karur exhibited a unique golden signet ring featuring a mithuna couple of extraordinary grace and beauty. One could see in this truly remarkable work of art the influence of the Graco-Roman lapidary in the portrayal which is still essentially South Indian in its ethos and idiom. As far as I know, this is the only known example of the 'royal art' of the Sangam Age (as distinguished from the 'folk art'). I arranged to have the ring photographed and wax impressions taken and invited Dr. Nagaswamy to publish the find (Dinamani 16, March 1991; Indian Express 17, March 1991).

By this time it was becoming known in the scholarly circles in Tamilnadu that the market was getting 'flooded' with coins, seals and rings picked up from the 'dry' river bed of Amaravathi at Karur. I had seen many of them, and quite a few were published in the dailies. I decided to investigate the phenomenon and visited Karur on the 16 February 1991, accompanied by Dr. Chitra Viji, the well-known art historian. We arrived there quite early in the morning; but even earlier Dinamani had hit the newsstands carrying the article by Dr. Nagaswamy illustrated by a magnificent enlarged colour reproduction of the Mithuna couple on the ring. The effect on the local bullion and coin dealers was sensational. The Mithuna ring which we had particularly wanted to see and, if possible, acquire, disappeared underground and the coin dealer nowhere to be found. It is sad to contemplate that due to avarice a truly precious work of art of the Sangam Age has been lost to Tamilnadu. You can read in this volume Dr. Nagaswamy's evocational description of this find.

The day at Karur was not wholly wasted. As we strolled along the Jawahar Bazaar, the main marketing centre of Karur, we could see in the glass cases of a few sarat shops, literally hundreds of coins of the Early period belonging to the Cheras, Cholas and Pandyas; many Roman coins in gold, silver and copper; and later coinage by the Pallavas etc. We were told all of them had been picked up from the river bed.

We then walked along the dry bed of the Amaravathi river. We could see several small groups of tribals digging

shallow pits and panning for coins and gold pieces. On an impulse I asked one of them to dig at a point chosen by me at random. A shallow circular pit was dug to a depth of about one metre where water level was reached. Out of this pit came in the next few minutes a square copper coin of the Cheras with the elephant and bow and arrow symbols, a copper Roman coin and a gold ring made of wire!

V

As Dr. Nagaswamy has pointed out in this volume, there is now overwhelming evidence from coins, inscriptions, seals, rings etc. that Karur was without doubt the ancient capital of the Cheras during the Sangam Age Dr. Nagaswamy has traced the history of Karur from the earlier times to the modern period, utilising the data from his own archaeological excavations and on the basis of epigraphic, numismatic and literary evidence. The story told by him is all the more fascinating as the narrator himself has played a leading part in unravelling the lost glory of Karur.

VI

I do not propose to deal with the contents of the volume in further detail as my purpose is to introduce the book. All the same I would permit myself one comment. I do not accept Dr. Nagaswamy's contention that the Tamil-Brahmi inscriptions are not earlier than 1-2 centuries A.D. The paleography of the script, near-identical with that of Asokan edicts, and the recent stratigraphic evidence of the inscribed sherds especially from the recent excavations at Arikamedu and Kodumanal indicate that Brahmi reach the Tamil country in the Late Megalithic - Early Historical Period and was adopted to the Tamil Language shortly thereafter some time towards the end of the third century B.C. or the commencement of the second century B.C. I am content to let the evidence speak for itself.

Dr. Nagaswamy is a rare combination of Sanskritist and Tamil scholar, archaeologist and historian, with an enviable skill for communicating his enthusiasm and knowledge to others. One more book from his pen is most welcome.

Iravatham Mahadevan, Madras, 20th December 1994

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Karur now in Trichy district of Tamilnad, is a town of great significance for the history and culture of the Tamils. It has played an important role in the Tamil region for over two thousand years. For the past one hundred years it has been turning out important artifacts and historical relics, that has invited the attention of scholars all over the world.

Karur's emergence as a centre of archaeological interest could be dated back to 1806, when several Roman coins were accidentally dug up as treasure trove. Considerable quantity of these coins disappeared immediately, but the ones that came to the Museum, pointed out that maritime trade of South India with Rome was considerable and deserved attention. This was followed by two more Roman hoards found at Karat, and also a number of treasures of Roman coins and jewels found around Karur. Immediately Karur reemerged on the International map after nearly two thousand years in all together a new context.

This led modern researchers to enquire into one aspect of Tamil Civilization, namely the capital of the ancient Chera Kingdom. The early Tamil literature refer to Karur as the capital of the Chera rulers. But they also refer to it as Vanci. The early mediaeval commentators mention Vanci as the other name of Karur.

From around 7th century or even earlier, the Cheras are seen ruling from the West Coast, of what is now called Kerala (Travancore - Cochin region). Late mediaeval literature locates Vanci, in the west coast. Recent memory is thus strongly attached to the west coast - the modern Kerala.

The opinion among the modern research scholars, vacillated from Karur in Trichy district to Thiru Vancikkalam in west coast. Two scholars, namely Prof. Krishnaswami Iyengar and K.G. Seshu Iyer, almost vehemently argued in favour of Thiru Vancikkalam and throughout their work they argue from a committed notion. As against their view, Pandit R. Raghava Iyengar, marshalled all available Tamil literary references, and presented in a disciplined, consistent and cogent manner. Karur as the capital of the Cheras of the Sangam age. R. Raghava Iyengar's work was a brilliant exposition. Prof. K.A.Nilakanta. Sastri, the great historian accepted the view of Raghava Iyengar and located the Sangam age Cheras at Karur.

And yet most of the Tamil scholars and scholars of Kerala were emotionally in favour of locating Cheras only in the west coast.

Then came the brilliant reading of the Pukalur inscription by Sri Iravatam Mahadevan, who showed that three generations of Sangam age Cheras, being mentioned in the record, near Karur. In fact Mahadevan pointed out that the name Karur mentioned in the record is within ten kilometers from Pukalur and he held that the ancient Chera capital was Karur.

In the year 1974 I conducted an archaeological excavation at Karur, which yielded Roman potsherds besides other important antiquities. I also wrote in 1974, on the identification of Karur, on the basis of archaeological, numismatics, epigraphical and literary sources.

The most historic find was the Chera coin inscribed, Kolirumpurai, found at Karur and identified and published by me for the first time. It is the most important turning point in the history of Karur studies. Subsequently two more inscribed coins one of Makkotai, and the other of Kuttuvan Kotai have been reported by R.Krishnamurthi of Dinamalar.

But this was not the end. One of the most outstanding golden rings found at the Amaravati bed at Karur, was brought to my notice by Sri Iravatam Mahadevan, who was kind enough to request me to publish it. My publication of the ring has almost sensationalised Karur studies.

Recently several other antiquities including late Roman coins have come to light from Karur. This is sufficient enough to re-evaluate the importance of Karur, the Chera kingdom, the date of Sangam classics and ancient Tamil civilization, which is attempted in this work. These evidences have now clinched the issue of ancient Chera civilization once and for all.

The Tamil literature and also Sanskrit works, written in Tamilnad refer to Yavanas, their life and work in Tamil land. They were overseas westerners who came in ships, bringing gold, wine, and horses and exchanged them for precious gems, crystals and pepper. They also settled in separate colonies called Yavanapadi. Yavanar irukkai or Yavanaceri in the capitals and port towns of the Tamil kings. They had dreadful weapons and were fierce fighters and were employed as guards to protect the gates of the

royal forts. They spoke in violent tongue and were often quarrelsome. Roman wine was in demand in Tamilnad and the Tamil kings were fond of drinking daily Roman wine poured by beautiful women. Roman lamps used in several places were also liked by the people. The Yavanas were great and skilful architects designing and constructing attractive structures like pavilions. Some of the royal palaces of the Tamil kings were designed and built by them. They were called Yavanat taccar i.e. Roman sculptor-architects. They constructed impressive chariots and decorated them with gold and precious gems. They worked in Tamilnad by the side of other skilful artisans who were known for their excellence and came from different well known centres of India. The sculptures modelled by the Yavanas were known for their beauty and workmanship. Above all, Roman jewel boxes made of gold and crystals were the treasured possessions of the Indian princesses and were used for storing jewels, gems, diamonds etc.

Thus in the field of architecture, sculpture, manufacture of vehicles, working in gems and gold, in weapons and warfare, and in wine, the Romans excelled the locals. The above points culled from literature need not be considered poetic conventions or exaggerations but reflect the very presence of the Romans and their avocation in Tamilnad is astonishingly proved by finds.

Roman skill and thoughts influenced the Tamils who did not hesitate to benefit by these incoming ideas and techniques. The best illustration being the local coins issued modelled after the Roman coins, incidentally pointing to the system of Roman economic managements of the Tamil country in the early centuries of the Christian era. Roman impact on Tamil life was far more closer than hitherto appreciated.

The later history and the literary and religious development centered around Karur are equally fascinating.

A vast body of literature and epigraphical sources are available, almost through the centuries, throwing light on Karur. It is seen that the Cheras were ruling with Karur as their capital, the country extending upto the west coast through the Palghat gap and were originally ruling the northern part of present day Kerala, upto 7th century a.d. Their activities in the south in Travancore region are not seen perceptibly. By the turn of 7th century they seem to have established themselves in the south of Kerala as well,

which reached as far as Travancore. This is evidenced by the Tamil work Pandikkovai - an early 7th cent. work. The Chera hold on Karur was weakening.

The Divyaprabandam of the Vaishnavite saint Thirumangai Alvar, (in the 8th cent.), the hero stones found at Karur (9th cent.), Aditya Chola's activities in the Kongu country in the 9th cent., Karuvur Devar's Thiru Visaippa in the 11th cent., Sekkilar's Periyapuranam in the 12th cent. and the royal grants of Kulottunga Chola III in the 13th cent. are the important sources that give us the history of Karur in the hey day of Tamil rulers.

Subsequent history of Karur, is seen from the Thiruppuhal of Arunagirinathar - 14th cent., Kongu mandala satakam (16th- 17th cent.), and Karuvur puranam of 17th. In the 18th cent. it played an important and strategic role in the Carnatic wars. Around 1800, after the fall of Tippu Sultan of Mysore, it was taken over by the British. Some information is forthcoming also from Palayappattu Vamsavali, collected by Col. Mackenzie. In the later half of the 19th cent. Karur was in the Coimbatore district, the ancient Kongu country, but in the year 1910, the British added it to the Trichy district.

This book is essentially the history of Karur, with special reference to its early history when it was under the Cheras. It is studied in this volume under two parts. Part I details the recent numismatic, epigraphical and archaeological finds and evaluate Karur's place in history and Part II is the history of Karur through the centuries. Karur was never under the Romans. The title 'Roman Karur' would at first sound misleading. Throughout the history it was associated with the Cheras. So it would be appropriate to call this book Chera Vanci. I have given the title Roman Karur to focus attention on the enormous amount of Roman antiquities - coins, potsherds, seals etc. found in and around Karur, and also the singular impact Roman contact left on the coinage, art and civilization of the Tamils, which have come to light by the recent discoveries. Perhaps no part of India has yielded such a large quantity of Roman artifacts. One would miss the importance of the recent finds to Tamil history, but for this title.

Two of my articles on Alagankulam and the Satyaputra record published elsewhere which have a close bearing on the subject have been incorporated as they might have been missed by scholars interested in this particular subject.



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1. Numismatic finds, Inscribed Chera Coins

The recent discovery of three inscribed coins and a flood of inscribed seals and antiquities from Karur in Trichy district, Tamil Nadu, calls for a reappraisal of the antiquity of the town, Indo Roman trade, and also the antiquity of Sangam Tamil literature.

Three coins of historical interest, with the portrait of the respective kings and the names of the Cheras have been found on the Amaravati river bed at Karur in Trichy district in recent years. The first such coin was brought to light by me in November 1987.(1) The coin has on its obverse a portrait of a king standing with the legend Kolippurai. The second such coin was found in November 1990 with the portrait head of a king resembling very much the portrant coins of the Roman emperors found in large numbers in South India particularly at Karur. A legend reading Makkotai in Tamil-Brahmi characters is found above the portrait head. The coin was noticed by Mr. Krishnamurthi of Dinamalar.(2) The third coin more or less similar to the first but with a slightly variant reading was noticed subsequently by a coin collector.(3) I have already published a detailed note on the first mentioned coin in the local dailies and followed it up with a research article in P.L. Gupta Felicitation volume.(4) Hence a brief account alone is given here. Recently another inscribed coin with the legend Kuttuvankotai has also been noticed by Mr. Krishnamurthi(5).

1. Kollipurai Coin

The coin was gifted by a vessel merchant of Karur along with a number of other coins, to the Karur Museum of the Tamil Nadu State Department of Archaeology, while I served as the Director of the Department. When received, the coin was totally encrusted beyond recognition. When it was cleaned in the Archaeological Laboratory, it was found to have Tamil-Brahmi legend reading Kollipurai. The description of the coin is as follows :

Obverse : Portrait of a king standing majestically beneath a torana with four turrets. In his extended right arm, the king wields a sword with its point planted on the ground. With his left he wields a shield also resting on the ground. To the left of the arch there is a tree issuing from a railing. Around the periphery is the Tamil-Brahmi legend, beginning at 7' O clock, which reads in clockwise direction Ko-L-I-P-Pu-Rai.

But for the legend and the script, the portrait would have been mistaken for a Roman soldier.

Reverse : A bow and arrow are shown prominently. At a corner is seen a wavy line inside which are seen two fishes swimming. At the other corner is seen the Meru mountain (the arched hill motif). Below the hill is seen a tank, in which may be seen turtles. In the solitary example I noticed, it looked like an animal, which I identified with hesitation as a tiger. But the subsequent finds of similar coins seem to suggest that it represents turtles within a square tank.

I have shown that the legend occurring on the obverse should be read as two words - Kolli and Purai and stands for Poraiyan, the Chera Lord of Kolli hills. The coin is obviously a commemorative one, issued by the Chera, to celebrate his conquest of Kolli hills. I have identified the Chera with Ko-Perum Cheral Irumporai the conqueror of Tagadur and Kolli hills. I have also assigned the coin to first cent a.d. This will be discussed further in the sequence.

2. Kolli irumporaiyan Coin

Subsequent to my discovery of Kollipporai coin in 1987, another similar coin was reported in 1989, from the river bed of Amaravati in Karur. (By Alakkudi Arumukam Seetharaman reported in Dinamani 17-11-89). On the obverse the coin bears the portrait of the king in full, standing, holding a long spear in his right arm and a square shield on the left. To the left of the king, a tree is seen issuing from a railing. The posture of the king with the spear and shield is clearly in imitation of Roman coins and the portrait looks like a Roman soldier. Along the periphery, beginning at eight O' clock, is a Tamil Brahmi legend reading - clockwise Ko-li-i-ru-m-pu-rai-ya-n. The letters are clear enough. The word has to be split into two as Kolli+Irumpuraiyan, i.e. the Irumpuraiyan of the Kolli hills.

On the reverse of the coin there are multiple symbols (a) the first is the bow and arrow (b) the hills with six arches and (c) to the left of the bow are two fishes in a tank. Above them is a demarcating line in angles - probably showing the sea, wherein we find four fishes and three turtles swimming. This is certainly another variety - probably another issue either of the same ruler or one of his successors.

A word must be said about the orthography of the letters. Ko is normal as found in the inscription of the age. The li has an additional horizontal stroke at the tail end with a slight curve, to denote the vowel sign i which would read l + i = li.

In the coin published by me, the l appears without this horizontal stroke for the vowel sign i. There the word is Kol and then the long vowel sign i appears. The reading in that coin is Ko-l-i. But in the later coin the reading appears as Ko-li-i. The second part, is to be read as I-ru-m-pu-rai-ya-n being the name of the Chera occurring as Irumpuraiyan, with the suffix 'an' at the end. Thus this coin makes it more explicit that the issue is that of the Chera, Irumporaiyan, the Lord of Kolli hills.

Mr. Krishnamurthi of Dinamalar has also obtained a similar coin later, which shows Kollippuraiyan coin was minted in large numbers.

Makkotai Coins

A few silver coins, with the portrait head of the King, and a legend in Tamil Brahmi reading Makkotai, have come to light recently.

Obverse: The head of the King resembling Roman portraits is figured in the centre and a legend in Tamil Brahmi reading Ma-k-ko-tai is seen above.

Reverse : Reverse is severely plain.

Mr. R. Krishnamurthi, who first discovered this coin, and published it in "Studies in South Indian Coins" Volume II, (6) has given very useful information on the coins, which may be noted here: (1) These are the first silver coins to be noticed so far, in Tamil Nadu, with the portrait head and legend. (2) They bear close similarities with the Roman portrait coins. (3) They have a diameter of 1.7 c.m. almost equal to that of Roman silver coin of Augustus (1.8 cm) and that they are half the weight of Roman Augustus coins, and (4) the reverse of the coin is plain.

There are other suggestions which Mr. Krishnamurthi has made, that need evaluation.

(1) "That the minting technology is indigenous and ancient". I feel that the very moulding of the portrait and the distribution of the legend, seems to suggest, that it is a technology borrowed from the Romans. Even the metal

seems to be the Roman one, reused. It is not unlikely that the Yavana artisans were employed in fashioning and casting these coins. That the Yavanas were fashioning and casting these coins. That the Yavanas were fashioning figures in Tamil Nadu is positively mentioned in Nedunalvadaï, a Sangam anthology(7).

(2) Mr. R. Krishnamurthi suggests that "the obverse and reverse were probably minted in two pieces and joined by molten lead paste". We may wait for the finding of such a coin, to confirm this assumption.

(3) Drawing attention to the paleographical similarity to Mankulam inscription, R. Krishnamurthi assigns the Makkotai Coin to 2nd-1st cent b.c. The date of Mankulam inscription itself is not finally settled, and paleographical comparison with just four common letters, which do not show any distinguishing peculiarity, is not a convincing point to date this to pre-Christian era. Mr. Krishnamurthi himself points out, that these coins and the Roman coins bear close similarities, and that Roman coins begin to appear only from the first cent a.d. So any date earlier than first cent a.d. is ruled out. Also that the Makkotai issue is later than Kollippurai coin will be shown in the succeeding paras.

(4) On the basis of slight differences in the portrayal of the heads, Krishnamurthi suggests five successive generations of rulers to have issued the coins. This is based on the assumption that (a) all the coins issued by one ruler are identical and (b) Each king issued only one series. On that account, to postulate 125 years span for these issues does not seem to be convincing. Each ruler might have issued different series, depending upon the situation and length of his rule. Secondly even successors could have issued the same type of coins as their predecessors. All that can be said is that they are different issues (Otherwise we have over fifty varieties of square copper coins coming from Karur itself and if for each variety one generation is ascribed we may have to postulate 50 generations leading to more than one thousand years). Regarding the identity of the King, Makkotai, Krishnamurthi has identified him with "Kottampalattu Tunjiya Makkotai". There is a poem in Purananuru collection,(8) sung by this Chera, bemoaning the death of his queen who was consigned to the fire.

There are two other poems in Puram (48 and 49) sung by Poet Poygaiyar. The name of the Chera appears as Kotai,

in both the poems, though the colophon gives him the title 'Kotaimarpan', after the beginning of the poem 48. This Kotai is said to be the chieftain of Tondi. It is not known whether this Kotai is identical with Makkotai.

The poem 172 of Puram sung by Poet Vatama Vannakam Damotaranar, is in praise of Pittan Korran, a commander under the Chera. The same poem also sings the greatness of King Makkotai who can be identified with the Chera, Makkotai. The reference to Pittan Korran, as a chief under the Chera Makkotai, leads us to further study the Sangam literature and arrive at a possible chronology.

At least six poets of the Sangam anthologies are seen singing the greatness of Pittan-Korran.

Karikkannan of Kaviripumpattinam -Puram 171.
Maruttuvan Damotaran of Uraiyur - Puram - 170. Vadama Vannakkan Damotaranar - Puram - 172. Katappillai Cattanar of Karuvur - Puram - 168. Alam Peri Cattanar - Aham 200. Marutan Ilanakanar - Aham 77.

Pittan is praised as a great warrior, commander of the archers, a commander under Makkotai, and the chieftain of Kutiraimalai. He is also called Vanavan and Maravan, and as such was probably related to the Chera. These six poets where contemporaries of other kings and chieftains prominent among whom were

1. The Pandya - Nan Maran, who died at Iilavantikai Palli
2. The Pandya - Peru Valuti - who died at Kutakaram (the name Peruvaluti appears also as Maran Valuti in Aham - 77) and
3. Thiru Mavalavan who died at Kurappalli.

It is seen that these rulers were near contemporaries of the following poets, as they have celebrated them in their poems.

Avur Mulam Kilar Aduturai Ma Cattan Alantur Kilar
Idaikkadar Aiyur Mudavanar Kovur Kilar Madalan Madurai
Kumaran, of Konattu Ericcalur Tayam Kannanar Nakkirar
Nal Iraiyanar Nappacalai of Marokkam Nakanar of
Vellaikkudi

By collating the patrons sung by these poets, particularly Nakkirar, we find that they were very close in point of time to the famous Chola Karikala(9) the Pandya Netunceliyan(10) the victor of Talaiyalankanam, the chieftain Elini(11) and the patron, Pari(12).

Pittan Korran, and Makkotai were later than the Chera-Kolliporaiyan. Thus Makkotai, the issuer of the coin (bearing the legend Makkotai) is later than Kollippurai-Perunceral Irumporai(13).

It is interesting at this stage to mention that the names Pittan Korran, occur in the Pukalur inscription. I. Mahadevan, who has commented on the inscription(14) holds that Pittan and Korran are father and son and that Korran was the son of Pittan and (2) Korran and Elini (son of Atiyan) are both described as the chieftains of Kutiraimalai, (Puram 158 - 168), it is probable that the place was seized from Atikaiman, and given to a Korran after the sack of Tagadur by Perunceral Irumporai.

John Marr in his "The eight anthologies" states - "It is more likely, perhaps, that he or forbears helped Perunjeral to defeat Elini, and were given Kudiraimalai in return for help" (p.218). It seems as mentioned by these two scholars that the Chera Makkodai, the overlord of Pittan Korran was posterior to Perumcheral Irumporai. We would therefore hold that the Makkodia coin was issued later than Kollippurai coin but not far removed in point of time. It is also not far removed from such great kings like Karikala Chola and the Pandya Nedunceliyan the Victor of Talaiyalanganam. We must also mention at this stage that the Epigraphical reference to Pittan occurs in Pukalur, near Karur in Tiruchi district. That the Pukalur inscription also mentions Karur is well known. The Kollippurai and Makkodai coins are found in Karur which has a vital bearing on the issue of the capital of the Cheras of the Sangam age.

Kuttuvan Kotan Coin

Recently another silver coin, bearing the portrait head of the Chera ruler and a Tamil Brahmi legend Kuttuvan Kotai(14) has been reported by Sri. R. Krishnamurthi. The coin is in the possession of Mr. Balusvami of Karur. It is 1.9 cm in diameter and weighs 2.300 gms according to the report. On the obverse of the coin there is the head of the King, a slim, long necked figure with sharp nose and high forehead. The head seems to be cropped and shows no signs of crown. The treatment of the neck line is absolutely like the Portrait heads and there could be no doubt that it is in imitation of Roman Coins. Around the head, starting from about 9 O' clock is the Tamil legend Ku-t-tu-va-n ko-tai. There are no other signs on the obverse. The reverse is

severely plain. Sri. Krishnamurthi, categorically assigns this coin to first cent. b.c. and draws our attention to the Poem 54 in the Purananuru anthology referring to Kuttuvan Kotai, the ruler of Kuttanad (?)

It is necessary to draw the attention of scholars to the paleography of the legend. There are seven letters on the coin. Thoughone has to be cautious in using paleography in dating the epigraphist will not fail to recognise, the clearly evolved forms of atleast six of the letters in this legend. The middle horizontal stroke in the letter "Ku" shows curving, a later feature. The symbol for the vowel "u" is placed to the left of the vertical line instead of right which is a strange representation. It may be attributed to the moulder's ignorance of the script. The vowel sign for 'u' in the letters 'tu' also shows a curving tendency, whereas the earlier forms had straight lines. The letters 'va' and 'n' show very highly evolved characters almost looking like Vatteluttu than Tamil Brahmi. This paelography seems to suggest a date even later than the Araccalur record 2nd-3rd cent. a.d. Similarly the sign for vowel in the 'Ko' is also clearly curved. The 'Ta' in 'tai' also is well curved. Thus six out of the seven letters clearly show curving signs, which appear as straight lines in early letters. To date this coin to first cent. b.c., on paleographical grounds is clearly untenable. It could only be placed towards the end of 3rd cent. a.d. and a date in the beginning of the 4th cent. a.d. may not be considered wrong.

It has been mentioned that there is a reference to the Chera ruler Kuttuvankotai in the Purananuru collection. The king is mentioned as Kotai (not as Kuttuvan Kotai) in the body of the poem, but the colophon gives the name "Kuttuvan Kotai" in clear terms. The name consists of two parts. Kuttuvan and Kotai and it stands for Kotai the son of Kuttuvan. Both the terms Kuttuvan and Kotai are general terms, used to denote the Cheras(15). There are several references to Kuttuvans and Kotais. As the legend in the coin gives the name Kuttuvan Kotai, the question arises whether he is not identical with the king mentioned in Purananuru verse 54.

The poem in Purananuru verse was sung by Madurai Kumaran, a Madalan (Maudgalya gotra) who hailed from Konattu Ericcalur. It extols Kotai, also called Kuttuvan Kotai. He is praised as a liberal patron of poets and a great fighter. Nothing further is known about this ruler. The

native place of the poet who sang this ruler is called Konattu Ericcalur. Konattu is the region adjoining Karuvur. There is a village here (not far away from Karur) even now called Ericcil (Valli Ericcil). This poem does not mention that Kotai was ruling Kuttanadu. The Chera ruler Kotai was ruling with Karuvur situated on the banks of the river Anporunai. Karuvur is said to be a very rich capital - Thiru maviyal nagar(16).

From the available poems(17) it is seen that the following rulers and poets were contemporaries with Kuttuvan Kotai - Pittankorran, Pandyan, Neduncheliyan, the victor of Talaiyalankanam, Perum Thirumavalavan and Nalam Killi. Among the poets Mulam Kilar of Avur, Kovur Kilar, Maruttuvan Damodaran of Uraiyr, Nakkiar and Karikkannan of Kaveripumpattinam. Kuttuvan Kotai is posterior to the Chera Perum Cheral Irumporai, but not far removed in point of time. We have seen that Perum Cheral Irumporai is to be placed in the first cent. a.d., Kuttuvan Kotai of the Purananuru poem, should also be placed towards the end of first cent. a.d. but preferably in the beginning of 2nd cent. a.d. The paleography of the legend in Makkotai, and Kuttuvan Kotai are so different that it is impossible to hold both as contemporaries. Kuttuvan Kotai, the issuer of the silver coin, was in all probability a later king, who ruled around the end of 3rd cent. and is not identical with the ruler mentioned in Puram poem.

We have seen that the silver coins of Makkotai were designed and cast by Roman artisans. The Kuttuvan Kotai, coin was also in all probability cast by Roman artists. That the Roman artists continued to be present in Karur, in the end of 3rd cent. and perhaps even later, seems to be indicated by this coin. This is further confirmed by late Roman coins assignable to 4th-5th cent. a.d. being found in Karur.

Inscribed Chera coin?

A square coin of the elephant type has been reported from Madurai(18) but its origin is traced to Karur. The coin is about 2.3 cm square and weighs 10.70 grams. On the obverse there is an elephant facing left standing in front of a tree raising from a railing. A legend is said to read "puraiyada a". I am unable to comment on this legend as the illustration is poor and I had no access to the coin. It is not unlikely that the coin came from Karur as suggested by Sri. Krishnamurthi. If the legend is correct then we have

another inscribed Chera coin the significance of which needs further study. However we will reserve our comments on this coin for the future. Krishnamurthi considers that the coin may belong to Celva Kadunggo Vali Adan of the 7th decade of Patirru pattu. He also suggests that the technology of the coin might have been adopted from the Romans and so assigns a date from 1st cent b.c. to 1st cent. a.d.

Notes

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2. Krishnamurthi R. (i) Makkotai coin, Paper presented at the First Oriental Numismatic conference, Oct. 1990. (ii) Makkotai coins, studies in South Indian Coins, Vol.ii, pp.89-93.
3. Alakkudi Seetharaman, Chera coin discovered near Karur, The Dinamani, 17th Nov. 1991.
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6. Krishnamurthi R., Makkotai Coins, Studies in South Indian coins, Vol. ii, Madras, 1992, p.89-93.
7. Nedunalvadai, in 'Pattu Pattu' anthology, Ed. Dr. U.V. Swaminatha Iyer, Madras Ed., line 101.
8. Purananuru, Ed. Dr. U.V. Swaminatha Iyer, 6th Edition, Madras, 1963, verse 245.
9. Ahananuru, 141, Sanga Ilakkiyam, S. Vaiyapuri Pillai, (no. 1354), Madras, 1940.
10. Puram 17; Pattu Pattu, Nedunalvadai (Vaiyapuri Pillai, S., 1381)
11. Aham-36, (Vaiyapuri Pillai, S. 1348), Puram-96.
12. Aham 78 (Vaiyapuri Pillai, S. 1350)
13. John Marr, The Eight Anthologies, Madras, 1985, pp.217-219.
14. Mahadevan, I., Tamil Brahmi Inscriptions, the Second World Conference, January 1968, Madras, p.96.

15. Vaiyapuri Pillai. S., Ibid, 1359, 1362, 1351, 1540, 1554, 1586, 1587, 1590, 1591, 1593, 1603.

16. Ahananuru, 93

17. Sanga Ilakkiyam, Vaiyapuri Pillai, S. Madras, 1940, p.1469, p.1479.

18. Krishnamurthi R., Sangam period coins with Tamil Brahmi legends, (copy circulated, date and place of publication not recorded) p.6 coin No.2.

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Roman Coins



Roman Karur

R. Nagaswamy

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It is well known that Karur has yielded several hoards of Roman coins, which has been commented upon by historians and Indologists. The earliest report on Roman coins found at Karur may be seen in Thurston "Madras Museum Catalogue of Coins No. 1", in 1874. It refers to the hoard of aurei, Augustus Claudius, dated 54 a.d. A large hoard of Roman coins-denarii, Augustus Tiberius (dated 37 a.d.) was reported in 1883 - (Madras Government Museum catalogue of Coins No.2). The third hoard was reported in the same year, which consisted of 500 coins of Augustus Tiberius (dated 37 a.d.) in a pot (reported in Madras Museum Annual Report - 1893). The fourth hoard consisted of 5 aurei including one of Claudius (dated 54 a.d.) in 1884. The fifth hoard was found in 1904, which consisted of aureus of Marcus Aurelius (dated 180 a.d.).

Besides these five hoards, some more hoards were also reported from places near Karur. They are (a) from Kattankanni, Dharapuram taluk, Coimbatore district, found in 1913, which consisted of 233 denarii of Augustus Tiberius (dated 37 a.d.); (b) Kulattupalaiyam, Dharapuram Taluk, Coimbatore district, (1934) which yielded aureus of Theodosius (dated 395 a.d.); (c) Pollachi, Coimbatore district - A hoard of denarii in a pot, of Augustus Tiberius (dated 37 a.d.).

Besides the above, other hoards in and around Coimbatore, as at Vellalur, are also reported. A detailed catalogue of such hoards is given by Sir Mortimer Wheeler in Ancient India(1), No. 2, pp.118-119. From the list it may be seen, that the earliest coin to have been found around Karur is that of Augustus, date of issue - 14 a.d. So far as Karur is concerned, the earliest coin to be found as Treasure Trove is that of Tiberius (dated 37 a.d.).

The next Roman coin of interest is a silver coin found in the excavation under my direction. However as the coin is badly corroded, not much could be made out. In recent times, some stray finds of Roman coins, including a gold aureus of Claudius are being reported now and then.

List of Roman Coins

(Found in and around Karur as per Wheeler)

1974 Karuvur - Hoard of aurei, Augustus Claudius (d. A.d.

54). 1883 Karuvur - Large hoard of over 500 denarii, Augustus, Tiberius (d. a.d 37). 1884 Karuvur - 5 Aurei, including one of Claudius (d. a.d. 54). 1884 Karuvur - Aureus of Marcus Aurelius (d. a.d 180). 1886 Kalayamputtur - 63 gold coins in a pot, Augustus Nerva (d. a.d 98). 1913 Kattankanni - 233 denarii, Augustus, Tiberius (d. a.d 37). 1934 Kulattupalyam, Aureus of Theodosius (d. a.d 95). 1882 Madurai - Honarius and Arcadius (c. a.d 400). 1984 Madurai - Aureus of Domitian (d. a.d 96). 1888 Mahabalipuram - Coin of Theodosius (d. a.d 395). 1888 Pennar, Dinarius of Augustus. 1807 Pollachi - Hoard of denarii Augustus Tiberius in a pot (d. a.d 37) 1937 Tanjore - Silver washed coin of Diocletian (d. a.d 305). 1891 Veilalur - Silver denarii (547 silver). 1843 Vellalur - 522 denarii, Augustus, Claudius (d. a.d. 14). 1932 Vellalur - 121 denarii of Augustus (d. a.d 14).

David W. Macdowell, in his paper "The evidence of Roman coins found in India", presented at the 'Trade on the Maritime Silk Route' seminar at Madras, 1990(2) has some remarks which are pertinent with reference to karur coins. "It has commonly been recognised that Roman coins found in India, were valued solely as bullion. In Indian finds, all the hoards of Julio-Claudian denarii which include denarii of Augustus (2 b.c. - 14 a.d) have terminus post quem of Tiberius (14-37 a.d.) or later. In these circumstances the single finds of denarii of Augustus cannot provide evidence of loss under Augustus. There is no clear evidence that any of the denarii of Augustus were lost or buried in India, in the time of Augustus - (p.3). In other words, "With very few exceptions, finds of Roman gold aurei, consist solely of aurei struck in the first and second centuries a.d. None of the hoards recorded has a terminus post quem earlier than the principate of Tiberius (14 - 37 a.d.)". Commenting on the date when the Roman coins reached India, Macdowell points out, that, "the occurrence of a Roman coin need not necessarily mean, that it was brought to India, during the reign of the ruler who issued it. "Roman coins remained in circulation within the empire long after the period when they were struck. For example, silver denarii of the Roman Republic struck in the second first centuries b.c., remained in current hoards found inside the Roman Empire, until the time of Trajan two to three centuries later. It is self evident that the date at which a particular hoard was deposited or lost must be later than the date of which the latest coin in the hoard was struck. It is also important to remember that the date at which a hoard was deposited may have been

some considerable time after the terminus post quem" - (p. 2 Macdowell).

The above citations prove that none of the Roman coins, ever reached Karur region before the time of Tiberius (14 to 37 a.d.) and possibly reached much later.

Some Republican coins, are reported to have been found at Iyyal, Kerala(3). However they were found along with the coins of Augustus, Tiberius, Claudius, Nero and Trajan (98 - 117 a.d.). The last of the emperors to be represented in the hoard is Trajan (98 - 117 a.d.) and that would show the hoard is to be dated to second cent a.d.

Recently a remarkable Republican coin(4) was reported from the beds of South Pennar river, in the Krishnagiri region of Dharmapuri district. The coin is a silver 'serratus denarii', with noted edge. According to Andrew Burnett of the British Museum, who examined the photographs, in a communication to the finder, "the coin is a Roman silver denarius of the moneyer C. Naevino Balbus, who minted coins in about 79 b.c. It depicts the Goddess Venus on the obverse and the Goddess Victoria, on the reverse". The coin was found by Mr. Ahmed Nishathudeen of Krishnagiri. No doubt that is a rare and important numismatic find, but this stray find does not indicate any contact with Tamil Nadu, in the pre christian era. The Iyyal hoard from Kerala, though has Republican coins, probably arrived in the south in 2nd cent. a.d. The Karur coins could at best have arrived in the mid first cent. a.d. It is against this back ground, the portrait coins of the Chera rulers, Kollippurai and Makkotai, which were issued in imitation of Roman coins, are studied here. The archaeological findings confirm this data.

Thirukkoyilur Roman Coins

A huge treasure of over 200 Roman gold coins were found in Sept 1992, at Soraiyappattu Village near Thirukkoyilur(5), in South Arcot district, Tamil Nadu. These were found accidentally while digging a land for laying pipelines. The casual labourers digging the land, divided the find amongst themselves and subsequently sold or pledged them through a school teacher, who swallowed the major gain. When the matter leaked out a month later, the government officials were able to recover 193 numbers of gold coins and four "Surai" and one diamond ring. The casket in which the coins were found could not be traced.

The entire collection contained only Roman coins.

According to a preliminary report published, the hoard consisted of coins issued by at least three Emperors-Nero (54-65a.d.), Domitian (92a.d) and Antonius Pius (138-161a.d).

I have examined this entire hoard except one coin which was in the court, I could examine each and every coin in the collection. It is one of the fabulous collection, in which twelve Roman Emperors are represented by their coins. The earliest Emperor to be represented is Tiberius (14-37 a.d.) and the latest is Caracalla (211-212 a.d.). The date of deposit could be placed in the 3rd century or later. The list of emperors, and the number of coins of each emperor as far as I could examine is as follows:

Tiberius	Claudius	Nero	Vespasian	Titus	Domitian	Trajan	Hadrian	Antonius Pius	Marcus Aurelius	Septimus Severus	Caracalla
14 - 37 a.d.	41 - 54 a.d.	54 - 68 a.d.	69 - 79 a.d.	79 - 81 a.d.	81 - 96 a.d.	98 - 117 a.d.	117 - 138 a.d.	138 - 161 a.d.	161 - 181 a.d.	193 - 211 a.d.	211 - 212 a.d.
3	5	18	20	15	7	9	42	63	4	4	2

In addition to the above gold coins, there is a fine diamond ring and four islets, originally rivetted and soldered to the coins to form a necklace. The following points deserve to be noted. The entire hoard consisted only of Roman antiquities and no indigenous object. It is a remarkable collection in which, the coins issued by all most all the Roman Emperor are included. Coins issued from the time of Tiberius to Caracalla appear without a break. The collector, who collected them in the 3rd century must have been a numismatist. In a number of coins the islet rivetted and soldered to a serrated ring, are still in position. A few coins show holes, which were for fastening. One of the coins show a cut on the head of the emperor as seen in some Roman coins found in South India. The hoard appears to have been originally used for jewellery and also as valuable precious metal. They seem to suggest that they were brought as jewellery or for making jewellery. These gold coins could have been exchanged either with the royalty or very rich merchants. That Thirukkoyilur was the capital of the Malaiyaman family from the very beginning of the history, adds meaning to the find. That the Roman trade continued to flow into this region.

Among the different symbols found on the reverse of these

gold coins, one deserve special mention. It shows a peacock. It is known that Romans imported peacocks from India. The coins are fresh as if from mint and do not show signs of wear. They were not obviously in circulation as currency and were primarily hoarded for jewellery.

A good account of the find is published by Mr. R. Krishnamoorthy of Dinamalar in the daily on Oct 5, 1992.

This hoard again confirms more emphatically that the Roman trade with Tamil Nadu was very active in 2nd-3rd cent. a.d. It is also significant that the hoard has been found at Thirukkoyilur, the ancient Capital of the Malaiyaman chiefs, close allies of the Cheras. Thirukkoyilur was captured initially by the Atiya chief Atiyaman Neduman Anci from the Malaiyaman chiefs Thirumudikkari, who later with the assistance of the Chera, Perum Cheral Irumporai, drove Atiyaman out and besieged his fort at Tagadur (for a fuller discussion of this episode see Chapter on Satyaputra Inscription).

It is significant that this hoard of Roman Coins has been found at Thirukkoyilur, a seat of Political power. Thirukkoyilur has yielded earlier late Roman coins of the 4th & 5th cent. a.d. It seems that the Romans were acquainted with this place and frequented it in connection with trade.

Late Roman Coins

Over 5000 late Roman Coins in copper or bronze have been reported from Karur. They mostly belong to 4th and 5th cent. a.d. Roman coins continued to arrive in the 3rd to 5th cent. a.d., in Karur and its surroundings. For example, the coins of Marcus Aurelius, datable to 180 a.d., probably arrived in Karur in the beginning of 3rd cent a.d. The coins of Theodosius, dated 395 a.d. found at Kulattupalaiyam near Karur, might have arrived in Karur in the beginning of 5th cent. a.d. However the recent finds of over 5000 coins, simply overwhelm the numismatists by the huge number. Most of them are fairly worn out, an indication that they were in circulation for long. From the first arrival of the Roman coins at Karur for their metal value, they assumed currency status over hundred years or more. The large number of Roman coins, in copper, found not only at Karur but in different regions seems to suggest that they were accepted as legal currencies and were in circulation among the common people(6).

Sri R. Krishnamurthi who himself has over four thousand such coins, from Karur, has published a good book(7) on Late Roman coins from Karur and Madurai. The book is sumptuously illustrated with all the important issues. Besides giving the updated list of Roman coins found in South India, mostly on the lines of Paula Turner's work. Mr. Krishnamurthi deals with the subject very competently and also quotes extensively from earlier authorities. As such late Roman coins are not discussed at length in this work.

Notes

Mortimer Wheeler, Sir, Ancient India, No. 3, pp. 118-119. The list given by Wheeler is given in the text. Subsequently Paula Turner has published a work on Roman coins in which she discusses in detail the Roman coins found in Tamil Nadu and corrects some of the earlier findings. See Paula Turner, Roman coins from India, London 1989.

Macdowell, The evidence of Roman coins found in India, Paper presented at the Silk Route seminar at Madras. The paper was circulated, but has not appeared in print.

Gupta P.L., The early coins from Kerala, Trivandrum, 1965, p.66.

Vide a report published in the Tamil daily Dinamalar, 1992

The Gold Treasure from Thirukkoilur, The Dinamalar, 5.10.92.; Sri Krishnamurthi R., has identified the issues of Roman emperors and published a very good account of them, in the above report.

Nagaswamy R., Thirukkoilur coins, published in Dinamalar, August 1984.

Krishnamurthi R., Late Roman copper coins, Madras, 1994.

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Punch Marked Coins From Karur



Roman Karur

R. Nagaswamy

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Several Punch marked coins have picked up in recent times from the Amaravati bed of Karur and most of them are now in private collections. In the absence of systematic documentation, it would be difficult to arrive at any definite conclusion about them as to whether they were local issues or have found their way to Karur in the course of trade. The present writer himself has seen a number of coins, quite a number of them worn out without any punch marks. Two in fairly good condition are now in a private collection. One is a rectangular issued and other a circular one. The symbols on the circular ones are clear and are five in number. They are punched around in an order. The symbols are

(1) Sun (symbol 1 of P.L. Gupta)(1) (2) Bull facing right - (No.43 of P.L.Gupta) (3) Two ovals and inside the oval are seen an arrow each. Probably it contained the third as well which is cut off by the circle. It is nearer to the symbol No.10 of P.L. Gupta without the arrows as spokes. (4) A spade like figure with a cross bar beneath which are seen two turtles. The spade head has a mouth like that of a bird. P.L. Gupta lists a similar symbol from Kottayam hoard in which the head is like a triangle instead of spade. It has a semi-circle around the head, ending with the cross which is not represented in the Karur coin. (5) The symbol is not very clear.

The symbols on the rectangular coins, though faintly visible, do not lend themselves for definition. One of the symbols, however is elephant.

Most of the symbols on this circular coin, are found in Punch marked coins found in Kottayam (Kerala) published by P.L. Gupta.

Regarding the Punch marked coins occurring in Tamil Nadu, P.L. Gupta has made some interesting observations in his special lecture at the 4th annual conference of the Tamil Nadu Numismatic Society, Madras, 14th April 1989 - under the title "South Indian Numismatics - problems and prospects". He says that "the Punch Marked Coins were not the local coinage of the region. They undoubtedly have come by way of trade. It seems to me that the southerners hardly had any need or had no likings for North Indian products, whereas the Northern traders needed the Southern products. The only course for them was to bring their own coins and purchase the commodities" (P. 12).

While that the coins have come by way of trade is true, the statement that the Southerners had hardly any need or liking for the northern products is not correct. The Tamil Sangam classics, and later inscriptions speak specifically of North Indian products being traded in the Tamil country. Trade is rooted not only on need but also on novelty. Nor is there any evidence to show that the southerners had no liking for North Indian Products. It has been shown that the early Tamil kings were performing vedic sacrifices and were gifting large sums of money as dakshina and the coins so gifted ought to have included the punch marked coins as well.

P.L. Gupta points out rightly, that the Punch marked coins were in use atleast upto the first cent.a.d. He points out that the Mambalam hoard of Punch Marked coins, included a coin of Roman Emperor Augustus. In his studies on Kerala coins(2) P.L. Gupta has drawn our attention to the occurrence of Roman coins in two hoards of Punch Marked Coins, from Kottayam and Iyyal(3). The Kottayam hoard of Punch Marked coins included a coin of Nero. The Iyyal hoard had a number of Roman issues, the republican coins, Augustus, Tiberius, Claudius, Nero and Trajan (98 - 117 a.d.). Gupta points out that the hoard should have been deposited either during the period of Trajan or later, as, his is the latest of the series found in the hoard. He assigns C.100 a.d. to the hoard. It is nto unlikely as Gupta remarks(4) that the Punch Marked coins, were in use as late as the beginning of the second cent. a.d.

Gupta refers to the Bodinayakanur and Tirunelveli (Tamil Nadu) hoards of silver Punch marked coins, and holds that they were local issues and issued by the Pandyas. It is held by some(5), that only the Pandyas issued the Punch marked coins. If the Pandyas could issue a local variety, there is no reason to believe why the other South Indian dynasties could not issue similar local issues of Punch marked coins. On the contrary, there was the compelling reason of trade and also payment of dakshina to brahmins in vedic sacrifices to issue similar coins. However, it is too early to say, whether the Karur coins were definitely local issues. Some obviously were. It may however be said that they were in use side by side with the Roman coins in the first and the second cent a.d. The recent finds of inscribed Chera coins Kollirumporai, and Makkotai, which we are assigning to first cent a.d., would show that the Punch marked coins, were in circulation along with the local coins of the kings

as well. This must also be viewed in the light of hundreds of square copper coins found in Karur, some with multiple symbols obviously issued in imitation of Punch marked coins and some with elephant and bow and arrow, mentioned above. One may visualise five different series of coins that were in circulation simultaneously in Karur during the first - second cent ad.

(1) Punch marked coins of the northern issues and perhaps also the regional issues.

(2) Roman coins.

(3) Inscribed coins of the rulers like Kollippurai and Makkotai.

(4) Square copper coins with multiple symbols issued in imitation of Punch marked coins. The reverse of these coins, in some cases, are plain without any marks, Probably they were brought in bulk from a central mint and the local emblem - the bow and arrow, imprinted later at Karur, and

(5) The square coin with the elephant on one side and the bow and arrow on the reverse.

The first two varieties - Punch marked coins and the Roman coins were probably of higher denominations as they are made of precious metals, gold and silver (copper Roman coins are considered later issues). Some local issues like that of Makkotai, are in silver but the rest - are all in copper and were obviously of a lower denomination.

Notes

1. Gupta P.L., The early coins from Kerana, Trivandrum, 1965

2. Ibid, p.13

3. Ibid, pp.64-65

4. Ibid, p. 64

5. Ibid

ROMAN HEAD ON PUNCH MARK COINS

In the year 1988, about 335 silver coins were found in a village Navalai, Harur taluk, Dharmapuri district. These are punch marked coins of irregular shapes varying from square to circle. These coins are now in the collection of Tamil Nadu State Department of Archaeology. A point of great

interest is that these coins are coated with copper and show impressions of Roman emperors, with legends. The cause for coating copper and imprinting Roman heads and legends is not known. Perhaps the Roman copper coins were circulating as popular currency and that some attempts were made to convert them into Roman copper coins. The discovery of these coins show that imitation Roman coins were in circulation and such coins were minted in Tamil Nadu. Scholars suggested that some imitation coins were made locally. The present find proves this suggestion. The Roman portrait and legends are yet to be deciphered. The hoard may be assigned to 4-5th century a.d. It is possible that by the time of conversion to Roman coins, the punch mark coins were no more recognised as legal currency.

Notes

Nagaswamy R., A report on the Navalai finds, Dinamani, 16.4.88.

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Satavahana Coins



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Karur has yielded a few Satavahana coins, bearing the name of the Satavahana rulers in Brahmi script. They show the commercial contact, the Chera capital had with the Satavahana Kingdom. Since the dates of Satavahana rulers are known, and their issues documented, the occurrence of their coins at Karur, helps us in assessing the age of flourishing Karur trade.

Coin of Pulamavi: A circular coin with the name 'Pudumavi' inscribed in Brahmi script on the obverse, and the Ujjain symbol on the reverse, has been found in Karur. The legend is in a straight line but does not have any other symbol. The lower part of the coin is somewhat corroded. The Brahmi letters are tending towards the nail-headed variety and may be assigned to 2nd cent. a.d.

The coin may be ascribed to Vasishti Putra Pulamavi II, who ruled between 88 a.d. and 116 a.d.(1). He came to the throne after Gautami Putra Satakarni. Vasishti Putra Pulamavi was a very powerful ruler who is said to have shifted his capital to Pratishtana (Paithan). His inscriptions have been found at Amaravati, Nasik, Karle and other places. Under his patronage, the art of Amaravati reached its Zenith. The Deccan witnessed all around economic prosperity under his rule. He has issued several types of coins like the elephant, horse, lion and chakra types. He has also issued a bilingual portrait series of coins - bearing on the obverse, the legend in Prakrit, reading Rajno Vashishti Putasa Sri Pulamavisa.(2) The reverse reads in Tamil? Aracanaku Vacitti makanaku Thiru Pudumaviku. The occurrence of his coin at Karur, would suggest that Karur continued to have a flourishing trade in the 2nd cent a.d.

Notes

Sharma I.K., Coinage of the Satavahana Empire, Delhi, 1980, pp.98-101, and 135. Nagaswamy R., (i) A bilingual coin of the Satavahana, Seminar on Inscriptions, Madras, 1967, p. Nagaswamy. R., A bilingual coin of Vasishtaputra Siva Sri Pulamavi, Journal of Archaeology of Andhra Pradesh; vol 1, pp. 105-113.

Durga Coins

Among the different varieties of coins found at Karur, one series of coins is of great iconographic interest. They may

be called Durga Mahishasura Mardhini coins. I have examined three such coins which are in private collections. The obverse bears an image, of goddess Durga.

Durga is standing erect, with both her legs planted firmly on the back of a recumbant Mahisha. Two hands are clearly visible. A long handled spear or sula appears by the side of her left hand. The right hand is raised in the pose of abhaya. By its side is a bow. Mahisha crushed by the feet of the goddess is lying beneath the feet facing left. A long bladed sword is seen above its neck.

Artistically, the figure no doubt belongs to 2nd - 3rd century a.d. Iconographically too, it is interesting. Which dynasty issued this coin series will remain doubtful for the present. The bow and arrow sign of the Cheras, imprinted on the reverse is not seen. The Goddess wields a long bow. Durga images in later sculptures do carry a bow.

The ear ornaments of the Goddess is big as found in early sculptures. Stylistically, the sculpture bears resemblance to early Kushana sculptures. The reverse of the coin bears a standing lion. On ground of style, the coin could be placed in the 2nd century. There are no other evidences to date this series. Since all the three coins I have examined come from Karur, it is likely that they were issued at karur. We are not sure who issued the coin. It might be that they were issued by the Cheras of karur, as they have issued the elephant and tiger coins.

The Cheras were great devotees of Durga. The Durga on the hill of Ayirai, was their family Goddess, as she is praised in a number of Sangam poems. Following the footsteps of their ancestors a number of rulers of this dynasty propitiated her (see the chapter on Chera karur). We may tenttatively identify the goddess with goddess Durga of Ayirai malai, in which case this will be the earliest representation of a god, portrayed in coin though religious symbols like trisula, chakra etc do appear. This Karur, give us material evidence for the study of religious faith in Tamilnad in general and Karur in particular.

Lakshmi Coins

Ab oblong Sri Lakshmi Coin has been found in Karur recently(1). The description of the coin as given is:-

Metal - Copper; shape - oblong; weight 2.500 grams; length 3 c.m., width 1.1. cm.

Obverse: Standing female figure with very narrow waist facing front completely nude. Feet turned half outward, arms are hanging down holding at each side, near the border a thin curved line which may be a flower stem, ending at shoulder level. The nude figure has prominent breasts and big hips. The reverse seems to have a tree issuing from a railing

It has been suggested by Mr.R.Krishnamurthi(2) that the representation is that of Mother Goddess and that "these oblong cons with Mother Goddess symbol found in Mullaitivu, Anuradhapura and Tissa (in Sri Lanka) might have gone from Karur, the capital of the Sangam period Cheras to Sri Lanka due to maritime trade". Mr.R. Krishnamurthi draws our attention to the studies, of these coins by Parkar H.(3) Father Heras(4) and also that of Codrington(5).

I may draw attention to the excellent study by P.E. Pieris(6). Pieris reporting the discovery of such coins by Parkar in 1884 and Mr.Still in 1907, from Tissamaharama and Tuparama at Anuradhapura, referred to the occurrence of this specimen from Kandarodai, and Vallipuram, in extraordinary variety. Comparing the finds of this specimen from the middle and North of Ceylon, Pieris, remarked "The figure is somewhat of inferior make, bold but not graceful, and the lines of the design on both the faces undoubtedly heavy. Those found in the North are singularly artistic and of good workmanship, while the metal though largely mixed with lead, is in no way brittle". Giving an accurate description of the obverse and reverse of the coin (p.52-53), Pieris identified the figure quite correctly with Sri Lakshmi. "The representation, is of course, that of Lakshmi or Sri, the Goddess of Wealth, Chief consort of Vishnu, who sprang from the ocean, when it was churned to obtain the ambrosia of the Gods. She is usually represented with two elephants pouring water over her from two pots. This is a Brahminical Vaishnava symbol", (p.53) Citing Rapson (Indian coins - page 7 also plate 1 No.15) - Pieris suggested that these coins were imitated from Greek coins. Pieris also reported two series - which he calls "Lakshmi coins". The first series displays a fair degree of merit, the figure not badly designed and the metal of substantial thickness. Of this, a dozen perfect specimens have been found at Kandarodai and three at Vallipuram. The second series is stamped on copper in some cases, as thin as paper of medium thickness, irregularly chiselled out

of a large sheet with the figure clumsily executed. A few perfect specimens of this series, and a large quantity of fragments have been found at "Kandarodai" - (p.54).

A chemical analysis of this coin, was made by Mr. Rae (pages 54-55) which showed.

lead - 59.93% copper - 11.84% silica - 0.62% iron - 0.14% nickel - trace

The coin reported from Karur may be rightly identified with "Lakshmi Coins" and that they are akin to the second series of coins, of great artistic merit, reported by Pieris. It should be mentioned that while very large number of such coins have been reported from Sri Lanka and that too mostly from Buddhist sites and whereas so far only one from Karur it cannot be said that the Ceylon coins were exported from Karur. The reverse may not be wrong.

The other point that deserves special mention, is the form of Lakshmi. Scholars familiar with the artistic trend in Sanchi and Amaravati sculptures(7), would at once recognize the Lakshmi figure to the mature Amaravati Phase, 1st cent. a.d. and not early phase of archaic forms.

Notes

1. Krishnamurthi R., *Oblong Copper Coin with Mother Goddess symbol from Karur, Paper presented at the Conference of the Numismatic Society of India, Aurangabad, 1990.*
2. *Ibid.*
3. Parkar H., *Ancient Ceylon, P. 475, coin no. 4 and pp.497 and 499.*
4. Heras Father, *Royal Asiatic Society of Ceylon, Vol XXXIV, no 90, 1937, p.47-48.*
5. Codrington, *Ceylon Coins and Currency, p.28.*
6. Pieris. P.E. *Nagadipa Coins, Journal of the Asiatic Society (Ceylon) XXVIII, No.72, 1919, pp.52-55.*
7. Sivaramamurthi, C., *Amaravati Sculptures in the Madras Govt Museum, Madras, 1977.*

Square Chera Coins



Roman Karur
R. Nagaswamy

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Thousands of copper coins, have been found in the Amaravati river-bed at Karur. Most of them bear a bow and arrow and ankusa on the reverse. Considerable number of coins bear a well executed elephant, facing either left or right. Above the elephant are seen the ashtamangala, auspicious symbols. In front of the elephant, are seen often a trisula on a long stand on base. The paraasu (axe) is also seen on the staff of the Trisula(1). In some a Cakra (disc) is in front on a long staff. In some coins, a creeper with leaves is seen meandering behind the back of the elephant. Some of the elephant figures are of exceptional artistic merit. The coins may be divided into three categories depending upon their sizes viz. (1) large, (2) medium and (3) small.

(1) Large size - 2 to 1.5 c.m. in diameter (2) Medium size - 1 to 1.2 c.m. in diameter

(3) Small size - 0.7 to 0.9 c.m. in diameter

Again, these coins are not of uniform thickness, which varies considerably. However, for purposes of easy understanding, they may also be divided into three categories as: (1) Thick (2) Medium and (3) Thin, like paper.

Square Coins - Large Size

Large size square Chera coins are found in great numbers from Karur. Over two thousand coins are reported so far, which are now mostly in private collections. I have myself seen a couple of hundreds of these coins. None of the square coins found so far in Karur, carry any legend and their dating would remain for the present only a surmise. However it is possible, to classify them typologically and also suggest a possible chronology. The large size square coins, can be classified into four major types.

Type A

"Punch-mark type" with five symbols. These coins are mostly thick in cross section. Four different types could be identified in this variety and in each a number of issues could also be distinguished.

Series 1: The obverse of these coins carry principally five symbols and are clearly in imitation of punch marked coins. It is well known that the punch marked coins carry five

symbols punched on the obverse. In Type A square coins from Karur, the five following symbols are found in order starting from the top, in an anti-clockwise direction. 1) a wavy line at the top representing a river or sea wave; a number of fishes are seen swimming on either side, 2) a bow and arrow, 3) the three arched hill, probably representing the Meru mountain, 4) a standing elephant with its trunk hanging down and its tusks pointing to the front. The treatment of the elephant is exactly like the elephant found in punch marked coin; it is crude and like a drawing of a child, 5) a paraasu, the cutting spade, is broad and prominent. This order is maintained in most specimens though some minor variations are noticed.

Series 2: The five symbols are found in order in the peripheries as found in the punch marked coins. However in the specimen, which we may classify as Type A, series 2, the bow and arrow is found in the centre and the other four symbols are distributed at the four sides. In both the series the obverse portraying the five symbols are cast in a mould. Technologically, it is a change from punching technique to casting by mould, but the symbols are in imitation of punch marks. Another point worthy of note is the size of the symbols. All the five symbols including the elephant are of equal dimensions.

The reverse of both the series, in most cases carry a small bow and arrow punched or stamped. The reverse of some of the coins is plain without any marks.

Type B

The Type B issues are interesting. Though the coins are generally square and in some cases rectangular, the symbols are found within an oval or circle. Except the elephant and the Meru, other symbols are different. There are no more five symbols. Instead we find four, but the elephant symbol is emerging as a dominant figure in the group. The following are the symbols found on top. Two or in some instances four fishes are found in a square tank beneath it is seen the elephant moving forward. It is no more an abstract childish elephant, but a realistic one with its trunk raised in front moving forward. Behind the elephant is the Caitya tree or plant. Above the lifted trunk of the elephant is the three arched hill. Thus the fishes in a tank, Caitya plant, the elephant and the Meru hill are the four symbols found in order. The whole group is enclosed by two circular or oval lines, with a row of fishes in between.

The reverse of these coins carry a small bow and arrow in the centre, enclosed within two dotted circles with a circular line in between.

Type C

It is almost similar to type B and carries on the obverse the elephant, the Meru hill, four fishes in a square tank, and the Caitya tree. The size of the elephant is bigger, which now occupies half the coin size. It moves forward with its raised trunk. The Caitya hill, shown above the trunk is very small. So is the square tank with four fishes, shown above the elephant. All the back of the elephant is the Caitya plant. The obverse is identical to Type B, except the size of the elephant.

The reverse of the coin, shows a bow and arrow in the centre. The arrow is shown fully drawn, the bow string in high tension. It is enclosed by two circular lines with a wavy line running around in between. Fishes are seen swimming in between the lines, which serves as a pattern. The obverse and reverse sides of both the types B & C are cast in moulds.

Type D Elephant Coin

There are several issues of this type. In all these issues, the whole of the obverse is occupied by the elephant which is the most dominant emblem. Hence, these may be called the Elephant Coins.

Series 1: The elephant is shown standing within a square. No other emblem is seen. The elephant is shown in deep relief. The reverse shows a bow and arrow and ankusa horizontally. The bow and arrow and the ankusa are stamped whereas the elephant on the obverse is cast in a mould.

Series 2: The issue is thick; showing the elephant in high relief on the obverse. Above the elephant, Srivatsa, sun, the Meru mountain etc. which are the mangala symbols are shown. At the back of the elephant the Caitya tree is shown. In front of the elephant are vertical staffs. The whole group of emblems, seems to have been shown within a square. The reverse has the bow and the ankusa. Some dots are seen flanking the arrow. Both the obverse and reverse sides are cast in mould.

Series 3: Same as above in all respects, but the staff in front

of the elephant has a trisula on top and a paraasu (axe blade) on the staff beneath the trisula blades. In some a parallel staff is seen with a flag.

Series 4: Same as above, except there is found a Chakra on top of the staff instead of the trisula.

Series 5: This series may be called the paper thin variety for, the whole coin is cast as a sheet of paper. In all respect this series resembles series 3 & 4 but the Caitya tree now looks like a creeper, with small leaves bending at the back, coming as far as the middle of the elephant's head. Either the Chakra standard or the trisula standard is seen in this issue also. The elephants are well moulded and as a class are great pieces of art. The reverse has the bow and arrow and the ankusa. Both the obverse and reverse of this series are also cast in moulds.

There are several varieties of elephants and the bow - arrow and the ankusa indicating that several varieties of this issue were minted and sent in circulation.

Series 6: In this series, the obverse is identical to issue 5, but the reverse shows the bow and arrow and the ankusa within a circle.

General Observation

That all these are issues of the Cheras is abundantly clear from the bow and arrow emblem. The Chera king is described as Villavan, i.e. one whose royal insignia is bow. Vil in Tamil means bow. The Cheras are praised in the Sangam literature for imprinting the bow, their insignia on the Himalayas. Right through the centuries, the Cheras are associated with the Bow emblem.

The elephant is also associated with the Cheras, in somewhat greater measure than the other two dynasties - Pandyas and Cholas. Palyanai Selkelu Kuttuvan, i.e., the Kuttuvan of several elephants; Yanaikkat cey i.e. the Chera of elephant look etc., are some of the significant titles. Though the elephant is a common symbol and is found in the issues of number of dynasties of India, and especially so the Satavahanas(2), the Cheras among the three dynasties of the Tamil country, were the ones to use the elephant as a prominent symbol right through the centuries.

In the absence of an authentic hoard of punch marked coins from Karur region, it is difficult to say whether any

regional punch marked coin, was issued by the Cheras from Karur.

As mentioned earlier, the type A, which is in imitation of the punch marked coins, should have been the earliest indigenous coin issued by the Cheras.

However it has been noted earlier that the reverse of some punch mark type coins are plain without any symbol and some stamped with a bow and arrow. It seems to suggest that the coins without any sign were cast in a lot by a central authority and then the Bow and arrow stamped by the local issuing authority. Even in the case of some Pandya and Chola - square coins of the same age - we find the punch mark type symbols cast on the obverse and the fish or tiger symbol stamped on the reverse in a small scale(3). Thus typologically, this punch mark type coins - seems to be the earliest coins issued by the Cheras.

About the symbols appearing in these issues, it may be mentioned that the elephant, the Meru, and the wavy water line with fishes are found in the punch marked coins. The bow and arrow and the parasu are however not seen and seem to be local introductions.

Type B & C, are shown having the following symbols - 1) the elephant, 2) the Caitya plant in a Vedi, 3) the Meru, 4) two or four fishes within a square tank, which are also symbols adopted from the punch marked coins. Also the motif of fishes or turtles swimming around, on the obverse or reverse of these coins, is also found in punch marked varieties.

Typologically, type B seems to have been issued later than Type A series, as both the obverse and reverse are cast in moulds. Type B & C are almost identical except that the reverse of type C, is more elaborate and therefore may be considered a later issue. The time gap between 'B' & 'C', may not be very great. The 'Type-D' coins show the elephant as the most dominant symbol on the obverse. This type includes an 'ankusa' by the side of the bow and arrow on the reverse. The series 1 of this issue has the symbols on the reverse stamped, while the other issues have both the obverse and reverse cast in mould, So, as far as the elephant coins are concerned, the stamped variety seems to be typologically earlier than the other issues. The paper thin variety (Type-D issues 5 and 6) seems to be the latest to be issued.

The portrait coins of Kollipurai and Mak-kotai, issued after Roman contact are assigned by us to the first cent.a.d. and Kuttuvan kotai to the 3rd century a.d. Both the obverse and reverse of these coins are cast in mould.

It is also seen that the earliest Satavahana coin, bearing the name of the king was issued towards the end of 1st cent.b.c. by Satakarni I(4).

The inscribed square Pandya coin with the legend Peruvaluti,(5) could also be ascribed to first cent.a.d. The horse with the legend in Brahmi characters are cast in a mould but the reverse with the triangular fish like symbol is stamped. This may be an issue of first cent. a.. imitating the Satavahana coins. Working backwards from the inscribed Chera coins, and comparing them with the Satavahana coins, the following chronology is suggested for the square Chera coins.

Elephant coin with the bow and arrow and ankusa stamped.
1st cent. a.d.

Type B, C & D: middle and late first cent. a.d.

Type D-series 5 and 6:-the Paper thin variety -post 2nd cent. a.d.

It is not unlikely the square coins were continued to be issued from the 3rd to 5th cent. a.d. as well, for we find the Pallavas of 6th cent.a.d. issuing square coins with the Chera emblem bow and arrow.

Square Chera Coins - Medium and Small Types

In the medium and smaller type coins, the following varieties occur.

(1) Standing elephant. (2) Standing horse (3) Standing tiger
(4) Standing bull (5) Multiple symbols and (6) Inscribed varieties.

It has been mentioned above that most coins bear the bow and arrow and ankusa on the reverse. These symbols are impressed not in the centre of the coin, but irregularly. The size and shape of the bow and ankusa also varies from simple to most beautiful forms. In some, the symbols are small, while in others, the symbols are bigger than the coin itself, showing that they were not designed for that particular coin, but were there with the authorities earlier. In some cases dots are seen within the bow while in others

dots are outside. In some, a circle of dots are found around the bow and ankusa. In many the bow and arrow and the ankusa are encased in a well formed circle.

The coins with multiple symbols (the punch marked type) which are generally thick, show an elephant, bow and arrow, Parasu, the arched hill, a river with fishes swimming, an axe and others. The reverse has the bow and arrow stamped on them.

There are some varieties, that do not show the bow and arrow on the obverse. They have the elephant, the tree from railing, two or more turtles moving inside a pond, the arched hill and fishes swimming. The reverse is plain without any stamping.

Description of some of the varieties are given below:

Medium types

The medium type of coins, occurring in Karur, may be classified into four categories:

(1) Elephant type: They show on the obverse an elephant, vigorously moving forward within a circle of dots encased by a circular line. The reverse has the bow and arrow, ankusa within a dotted circle. Two dots are seen inside the bow as well.

(2) Standing Elephant type: On the overse they bear a figure of an elephant standing and on the reverse, the bow and arrow and ankusa.

(3) Horse type: It has on the obverse a standing horse and on the reverse bow and arrow and ankusa.

(4) Multiple Symbols type: Like the larger types, this haw on the obverse a number of symbols - bow and arrow, arched mountain, fishes within a pond, river line with fishes, parasu and probably elephant. The reverse shows bow and arrow.

Smaller Coins

(1) Horse type: The tiny coins, in paper like sheets are found in great quantity. Mostly they bear horse on the obverse standing before an altar. Behind the horse is a meandering creeper, issuing from a railing. The horses are of varying sizes and some of them are of remarkable artistic execution. In most cases the horse in shown standing on a

horizontal line, but in one or two, it is shown on a curved line indicating that it was printed within a circle. On the reverse are seen the bow and arrow, sometimes encased in a circle.

(2) Tiger type: Some of the tiny coins bear on the obverse, a standing tiger, with the mouth opened and the tail uplifted. The front leg is lifted. The reverse carries the usual bow and arrow and the ankusa.

(3) Elephant type: Tiny coins with elephant on the obverse with a Srivatsa above and the bow and arrow on the reverse are also found, but their number is not so great as the horse type.

(4) Bull type: Tiny coins, not of the copper variety, but somewhat leaded occur in small quantity with the bull standing on the obverse. The reverse carries the usual bow and arrow and ankusa symbol.

(5) Multiple Symbol type: Tiny coins with multiple symbols on the obverse, as in the large size, also occur in smaller numbers. The reverse has the bow and arrow sign.

(6) Coin with a Grid: A special variety with a grid of squares - $3 \times 3 = 9$ squares are also seen. In the centre of the square, circles with dots are noticed.

(7) With other Symbols: There are a few other coins with varying symbols.

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Square Chola Coins From Karur



Roman Karur

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Square copper coins, with the Chola emblem, tiger on one side are being found, in good numbers in the Amaravati bed of Karur. These coins are not only interesting typologically but also seem to throw some light on minting coins. There are three distinct series of the tiger coin.

Series 1: The obverse of the coins carries multiple symbols like the Caitya tree, elephant, four fishes in a pond, the arched Meru mountain, and what seems to be a temple. A row of fishes are shown swimming on the borders. The reverse, which is mostly plain has a figure of a tiny tiger punched. It is clear that the punches have been put later. The coin is approximately 2 c.m. square and weights 7.100 grams. Mr. Krishnamurthi suggests that this may be a copy from the silver punch marked coin. In fact all the multiple symbol coins are copies of punch marked coins(1).

Series 2: It consists of square series with an elephant prominently shown, either alone or with chariot with horses. In some instances, a flag or an umbrella is seen above the elephant. In some specimens, the elephant is shown standing before a Caitya tree. A parasol is seen above the elephant. The reverse has a standing tiger with its tail and front leg lifted.

These coins are approximately 2 c.m. square but weigh around 5 grams. Quite a number of such coins are illustrated by Mr. Krishnamurthi in his book (in Tamil) 'Sangam age Chola coins'(2) but the place from where they were obtained is not mentioned. But in his article 'Coins of the Sangam Period Cholas' - (a paper presented at the Numismatic Society of India - Conference-Dharmasthala-1991), he has published seven coins, coming from Karur. He assigns them to first cent.b.c. He also suggests that coins were made in two pieces and soldered together.

Series 3: The third series of coins, are likely to pose some problems regarding identification. A standing tiger is noticed on one side but on the other side the bow and arrow are seen. These are medium or tiny coins found in good numbers in the Amaravati bed of Karur. The bow and arrow would suggest the Chera origin, whereas the tiger emblem would indicate a Chola origin.

Circular Copper Coin

Besides these square coins, the Karur town also yields a circular copper coin series. On the obverse it carries an elephant standing. Above the elephant is srivatsa topped by a parasol. In one, there seems to be a flag mast in front of the elephant. The reverse carries a standing tiger with its front leg raised, and the tail lifted. In front of the tiger is a staff with a triangular head and the flag shown fluttering. The tiger and the flag are encircled within the dotted line. The question arises whether these coins were issued by the Cholas.

So far as the dating of these tiger coins are concerned, they are generally assigned to the Sangam age. Such square coins with tiger emblem have been found in the excavations at Kaveripumpattinam(3) the ancient port of the Cholas by the Archaeological Survey of India. They are said to occur both as surface collection and in the excavations. As the stratigraphical positions and the relative chronology is yet to be published, the dating still remains a surmise.

However, it is not wrong to hold that they are coins of the Cholas. Beginning with Vijayalaya Chola, in C. 850 a.d., they represented their tiger seated(4) in their seals, coins and inscriptions. The standing and roaring tiger is certainly the emblem of the Cholas of the Pre-Vijayalayan age. So far no inscribed coin, with the Chola name, has been found with the roaring tiger symbol. The dating is purely on typological and associated finds. We may not be wrong in accepting them as the coins of the Sangam age Cholas. The occurrence of the coins in Karur, may primarily be attributed to trade. We may also point out that even in the Sangam age, Karur was captured by the Cholas on more than one occasion as mentioned in Sangam classics. Ouram 36 refers to the Chola ruler Killivalavan who scattered the sands of Karur on the banks of the An Porunai. Another verse, Puram 373, mentions that Karuvur was captured by the Chola Killivalavan who died at Kurappalli. These Sangam poems clearly indicate the occupation of Karur by the Cholas for some time in the Sangam age. Another poem in the Purananuru collection (Puram-5), states that 'Ol Vat Ko Perum Cheral Irumporai recapturing karur or crowning himself at Karur (probably after some disturbance). At any rate, that the Chola Killivalavan captured Karur is made explicit.

Besides Killivalavan, the Chola Nalam Killi also seems to have captured Karur, and was prepared to confer even Vanci (Karur) on the bards(5). The commentator, takes this

as Vanci Karur.

Besides these poems, mediaeval literature, especially that of Sekkilar refers to Karur as the ancestral city of the Cholas(6) (of the Sangam age). A certain Pukal Chola, who was raised to the status of a Nayanar is said to have ruled from Karur.

The coins bearing on one side the tiger emblem of the Chola and the bow and arrow of the Chera may be viewed in this context. Though the Chola rule was imposed on Karur by Killivalavan, the Chera emblem of bow and arrow, has to be embossed on the coins, if it was to be accepted as a legal currency atleast at the initial stages. We see Raja Raja Chola, issuing coins in the 11th cent., with the emblems of the conquered territory in addition to his own(7). When the rule of the East India companies were imposed in Pondicherry, and Madras, we notice the already prevalent devices, being used in the coinage. The coins from Karur with the tiger emblem on one side and the bow and arrow on the other may be considered the issues of the Cholas when they were in occupation of karur. They might have been issued when the Chola Killivalavan occupied Karur. If this be so, then the tiger and the bow and arrow coins, the third series mentioned above may clearly be attributed to the Sangam age. We do find the early Pallavas, issuing coins some what later from Karur with the bull on the obverse and the bow and arrow on the reverse.

It seems to us that one of the coins of series I gives us the clue to the technology employed in issuing such coins in early times. It is likely that such coins were cast in a lot with multiple symbols on the obverse, by the central authority. Subsequently the reverse was heated up and the required design punched by different local authorities at different places. Some coins, with the reverse plain without any symbol - punched or struck, have also come to light, which indicate, that coins with the symbols struck on obverse were produced at central place and sent to different centres where the reverse was stamped by the local authorities. It may also be mentioned that, in the elephant type coin, the elephant is seen within the boundaries of the square coin, the reverse symbol which is a simple sign is imprinted irregularly. Quite often they are not in the centre. They vary in size and shape and frequently, the symbol purchase were available before the coins were received. It is not out of place to mention, that in one hundred coins,

the position and form of reverse symbols vary almost hundred times.

Notes

1. Krishnamurthi R., (i) *Coins of the Sangam period Cholas*, paper presented at the Numismatic Society of India, Dharmasthala, 1991. Mr. Krishnamurthi assigns this coin to 2nd cent.b.c. Sharma I.K., assigns this to 1st cent b.c.-1st cent a.d. in his *South Indian Coinage; a review of recent discoveries*, 1992, .247.
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3. *Indian Archaeology*, a review, 1963-64.
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6. *Periyapuram* by Sekkilar, Published by the Saiva Siddhanta Maha Samajam, Madras, 1950.
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Pallava Coins



Roman Karur

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Some coins approximately 1.5 c.m. square, bearing on the obverse a bull, fairly in bold relief are found at Karur. The bulls are perfectly in Pallava form and seem to be reclining. No other symbol is seen on the obverse. In one specimen the bow and arrow and ankusa are seen on the reverse but in the others the emblem is not visible. Two such coins were examined by me. Sir T. Desikachari, has illustrated a few such bull type coins under the Pandya coinage(1). Commenting on these coins, Desikachari states Those which appear to be the earliest issues do not bear the emblem of the fish but are square pieces, bearing well executed figures of the elephant and the bull(2). The reverse of these coins bear the triangular diagram identified with stylised fish.

While the bull found on the Karur coins bear close resemblance to the Pallava Nandi in Tondaimandalam, the bull from the Pandya region with the triangular diagram on the reverse, has no such resemblance. This needs explanation.

Circular Coins

Circular coins, both inscribed and uninscribed of the Pallava's have also been found in considerable number in Karur.

Uninscribed circular coin, probably leaded bronze is larger and of considerable thickness. It shows on the obverse the Pallava type of bull standing. There is no other symbol or legend on the obverse. The reverse has two circles.

Inscribed Coin: I have examined three coins with inscriptions from Karur. It is the usual pallava type, on this sheets. On the obverse are seen a bull standing within a circle with a legend above reading Sri-Bha-ra-h. The legend is absolutely legible. On the reverse of the coin are two well executed fishes within a circle. The outer side of the circle has semi circular decoration all round. Though the coins are of the same size and metal, and bear the same legend, a careful examination of the bull form reveals that they are minted in two different dyes. In one, dots are seen on the body of the bull.

Karur under the Pallavas

The Pallava Power was extended upto Trichy on the banks

of the river Kaveri under Simhavishnu, the father of Mahendra I. Simhavishnu's conquest of the region may be placed around 575 .a.d.(3). Though there is no definite reference to the conquest of Karur by any Pallava, it appears as a territory under Nandivarman Pallava Malla in the 8th cent(4). It seems therefore possible, that the conquest of Kaveri region by Simhavishnu, included Karur for it is hardly 40 miles away from Trichy. It was obviously under the Pallavas from the 6th to 8th century. In the time of Pallava Nandi II (mid 8th cent.), we find bitter fights between the Pallavas and the Pandyas taking place in and around Karur. That the Cheras, frequently called Keralas, had by then settled themselves in the West is suggested by the Sivaramangalam plates(5). The Keralas are said to have come from the western direction, whereas the Pallavas came from the east towards Pugalur - Karur, to help the Atiya, who was being driven by the Pandya. A certain Atiya(6) is seen at Namakkal excavating two cave temples(7) - one to Anantasayi Vishnu and the other to Narasimha. The cave temple to Vishnu at Tantonirmalai hill at the outskirts of Karur is also ascribed to the Atiya by H. Sarkar(8). Atiya's titles suggest that he was closely related to Rajasimha Pallava 725 a.d.(9). The fact that he embarked on excavating the two great cave temples indicate that he wielded considerable power in the region. So the Pandya Parantaka chose to drive him out and inflicted a defeat on the banks of river Kaveri at Ayiraveli Aiyilur and Pugalur. These places are very near Karur. The Pugalur referred to here is the Pugalur where the Chera inscriptions in Tamil Brahmi legend are found(10). That, Karur is hardly 12 miles from Pugalur has been noted already.

Alwar Thirumangai says that the Pallava defeated the Pandya at Karur(11). The Dalavaypuram copper plates state that the Pandya defeated the Pallava at Karur(12). Evidently the battle of Karur between the Pallava and Pandya was severe, both sides claiming victory over the other. This should be placed around c. 775 a.d. For the next hundred years, Karur should have changed hands between the Pallava and Pandya. By 875 a.d., the place had passed on to the Imperial Cholas under whom it remained atleast upto 1200 a.d.

We find Karur was under the Pallavas from 575 a.d. to 775 a.d. for nearly 200 years. The Pallava coins found at Karur should be viewed against this background.

Two types of Pallava coins are found at Karur - the square coins and the circular coins. From the history of Pallava coinage so far known⁽¹³⁾, it is seen that only circular coins were issued since the time of Mahendravarman I (590-630). Coins of 'Sribhara'⁽¹⁴⁾ the issues of Rajasimha Pallava have been found in Karur-725 a.d. The square coins with the Bull emblem of the Pallavas should therefore be considered pre 7th cent. (pre Mahendra I) age. They may be assigned to the age of his predecessor Simhavishnu. A point of interest in the square bull coins is the occurrence of the Chera royal crest the bow and arrow, and ankusa. Obviously to be accepted as a legal tender in the Chera region, the Pallavas used the bow and arrow emblem on the reverse. These coins may therefore be called the Karur issues of the Pallavas. Later in the 7th and 8th centuries circular Pallava coins issued from Kanchi were also in circulation at Karur.

The Karur issues of the Pallavas also give a clue to the dates of the square coins found at Karur⁽¹⁵⁾. At present it is considered by all scholars, that all the square coins, the elephant or Caitya type were issued during the Sangam age. This view is not necessarily correct.

That square coins continued to be issued till the end of the 6th cent., is now proved by the square Pallava coins. It is not unlikely that many of the Karur square coins were issued upto 6th cent. a.d. However it is difficult to assign any chronology to them, in the absence of any inscribed or stratigraphically known coin.

Notes

1. *Desikachari T., Sir, Pandya Coinage, Madras, 1916, p11*
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4. *'Divyaprabandham' - Periya Thirumoli of Saint Thirumangai Alvar, no.1134, Ed. Venkataswamy Reddiar, Madras, 1973*
5. *Indian Antiquity, Sivaramangalam plates vol XXII, 1893.*
6. *Namakkal inscription, South Indian Inscription, Vol.XXII, No.7.*

7. *Vidya Dehejia, Nammakal caves, Madras - 1977.*
8. *Sarkar H., Souvenir of the Pasupatisvara temple, Karur, year - 1974 page.*
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12. *Ten pandya Copper Plates, Dalavaypuram Copper plates of Parantaka, Viranarayana, Madras, 1967, pp.83-130.*
13. *Tamil Coins, a study, Nagaswamy, R. Madras, 1981, p.125.*
14. *Sri R. Krishnamurti and Sri. Alakkudi Seetharaman, have in their collection, some Pallava coins from Karur. The latter has published recently a Pallava coin, circular in shape, with a standing bull and a Tamil legend reading Pakapituku, on the obverse, and a wheel on the reverse. Obviously it is a coin of Mahendravarman I. The coin is said to come from Kanchipuram.*
15. *Sri Krishnamurthi assigns all square coins to pre christian era.*

Coin Moulds



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Some terracotta coin moulds have been found in Kanchipuram excavations(1). They include moulds for casting punch marked type coin and Satavahana coins. It is seen from these moulds, local issues of Punch marked coins were common and that the technique has now changed. Instead of punching every coin, casting with similar symbols had become easy and was adopted. The article on Kanchi coin moulds, does not mention, the number of symbols that were there on each face, but denotes two symbols - the sun and the bull.

The Satavahana coin moulds found at Kanchipuram, are said to be moulds for casting coins of Vasishti Putra Pulamavi and Vasishti Putra Satakarni. That Satavahana coins were cast even at Kanchi is thus proved by these moulds. It included the coin of Vasishti Putra Pulamavi II. That Pulamavi's coin has been found at Karur has already been mentioned. The finds of these coin moulds indicate five distinct phases in the technology of minting coins.

Phase 1 : is the punching phase. The earliest indigenous coins are the ones with a number of punches, generally five, punched on sheet metals cut to sizes.

Phase 2 : Issuing same type of coins, but cast in moulds instead of being punched.

Phase 3: Same type of multiple symbol - coins were cast in moulds. The symbols were cast on one side and the reverse was left plain. But the regions which acquired them for circulation, either punched their symbols on the reverse or even stamped them. The large numbers of multiple symbol coins, found in Karur, some with the regional symbols punched or stamped on the reverse, clearly demonstrate this phase.

Phase 4: Once these multiple symbol type of coins were accepted, the next stage was to choose one symbol - like elephant, horse or the caitya vriksha to be shown prominently on the obverse and the regional or royal symbol represented on the other side.

Phase 5: Coins with the portraits of the king or the royal emblems, with their names inscribed, were issued in Tamil Nadu imitating the Roman Coins.

While postulating the above sequence of each phase

succeeding the other, it is not possible to suggest a long time gap between two phases except perhaps between the first and the second phases, that is the punching phase and the casting phase. Once the casting technique was introduced, the other phases were witnessed in quick succession, specially in the context of Greco-Roman contact. The inscribed coins begin to appear only from the first cent. a.d. The Karur coins have thrown very valuable light on the technological advancement of minting coins in the early centuries of the Christian era.

K.G. Krishnan, in his articles 'Minting industry and process of coining in Tamilnadu' Studies in South Indian coins(2), gives interesting details on minting process from mediaeval inscriptions. But neither the source nor the date of the inscription is mentioned. However the details given in the inscription are very interesting. The relevant part of the record reads.

Pon Cuttu Vetti, Cudu Koduttu Kacarri, Kaiccelvadu, Kalancir Pertta tulaippon, Uraiyum Tulaiyum valuvadadu

From this epigraphical passage, it seems, the gold ingots were (1) heated and cut to required sizes, (pon cuttu vetti), again these cut pieces were heated (cudu kaduttu) and stamped as coins (Kacarri) and issued for circulation. (Kaiccelvadu) and again Kalanjipertta i.e. converted (into coin) from Kalanju (lump of standard weight gold), tulaippon i.e. stamped or punched, and Uraiyum tulaiyum valuvadadu i.e. not faulty in standard of fineness and weight.

The inscription seems to suggest two techniques of casting coins the first by casting in dyers or moulds from pieces of metal specially cut for the purpose and the second, punching in globules Kalanju which were already available in certain weight measure (as in the case of Dhavalisvaram hoard)(3). In both the cases, before punching or casting, the metal was heated up or melted. The goldsmiths in their household furnace even now heat up the metal in coals with blowers and flatten it by beating or drawing into wires, all the while holding red hot metal with tongs. A similar technique should have been adopted the stamping coins. While stamping on one side, possibly the hot coal was put only on one side to soften that side and the stamps punched. The inscription suggests that both the techniques existed side by side. Though the above record refers to the techniques prevalent in mediaeval times, they would not

have differed much in earlier times when the Karur square coins were made.

Another inscription also of the mediaeval age, suggests, the coin moulds, used for manufacturing coins were stored in secure places called Karuvu Kalam(4). Karu is the Prakritised form of the Sanskrit word garbha i.e. the moulds (to hold the coins); Kalam is the place of work or storage. From this word Karuvu Kalam is the place of work of storage. From this word Karuvu Kalam the word Karuvulam was derived and is generally now used for treasury or storage place. The inscription refers to minting coin in the Karuvula Kadamai irukkum alavil Karuvukalattu adikkum panam(5). The inscription refers to an undertaking by the territorial assembly to pay their dues (Kadamai) by paying the coin (Panam) minted in the Karuvukala. Here in all probability the coin panam mentioned is a silver issue. It also shows the territorial assemblies were empowered to mint coins.

It has been suggested that Akkasalai, is a state mint, and that Karuvulam(6) a territorial mint. The reference to Akkasalai Vari in many inscriptions meaning tax on Akkasalai, would negate the suggestion that Akkasalai were state mints. It could only suggest that simply they were mints and used as synonyms of Karuvulam, the former solely devoted to minting whereas Karuvulam, also stood for treasury. These mediaeval records clearly demonstrate, that the big village assemblies, and the territorial assemblies were empowered to mint coins and were taxed for that work. The elected representatives of the assemblies-like the Pon variyams(7) looked after the minting of coins. Since innumerable assemblies were issuing coins, it was necessary to test their standard of fineness and weights when they came in for circulation and these committees looked after this functions as well. The members of the gold committees were probably in charge of the dyes or stamps and were authorised to stamp or use them. This system gives us a clue to the punch marking of the coins. The committee consisted of five members, each in charge of a particular symbol. The variation in symbols on punch marks may be attributed to such varying committees. We have seen that the hundreds of square coins found at Karur, carry elephant and Bow symbols, but show bewildering variety in form and size. It is perhaps due to the presence of several authorities issuing coins, the form and size varied, though the devices were the same.

It has also been suggested that the Tulaippon meant a punch marked coin(8). The mark by punching is called Tulai. Invariably it is a depression, and not a hole, never met in the collections. But Dr. Meenakshi(9) has drawn our attention already to this fact and says 'Tulaippon is identified by reason of a hole at the centre, which is believed to be a base mark certifying the genuineness and fineness of the gold used'. Videl Vidugu Tulaiitta-sempon was evidently a gold coin bearing the Videlvidugu mark. Meenakshi quotes from ARE 297 of 1902. It suggests that Tulaippon meant also an inscribed coin.

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Karur Archaeological Excavations



Roman Karur
R. Nagaswamy

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Karur was excavated under my direction. Six trenches were laid in the following places of the town. The excavations were mainly exploratory in nature to assess the archaeological potential of the township(1).

1. Jaiprakash School (trenches KRR 1 and 2). 2. C.S.I. High School ground (trench KRR 3). 3. Taluk office (trench KRR 4). 4. Boy's High School near the Pasupati temple (KRR. 5). 5. The Girls High School (trench KRR 6).

Among the important antiquities discovered during the excavation, the following deserve special mention; the Roman amphora, rouletted ware, russet coated ware, inscribed black and red ware with Tamil-Brahmi inscription and mat design pottery. A corroded Roman coin in silver, a square copper coin with an elephant on the obverse, and the bow emblem in the reverse, are other important finds. In all these excavations, the natural soil was reached. At the Jayaprakash school and the girls high school ground which are located at a high level, an occupational deposit of about 5 meters were noticed - (4.52 m in the former and 5.25 m in the latter). It was found that the town had a continuous occupation without any break.

Amphora pieces of the imported varieties were also found in the above two sites. The following were the finds.

1. A rim of an amphora 1.10 m depth 2. A rim of an amphora 1.85 m 3. A double handle 1.75 m 4. A shoulder and a part of the handle 4.30 m 5. A sherd 4.30 m 6. A sherd 4.50 m

(Items 1 to 3 were found in the Jayaprakash school and the rest in the girls high school).

Imported Rouletted wares were found in KRR 4 (2.80 m) and KRR 6 (depth 2.40 m). Three fragments of imported arretine ware were found as surface collection but none in the regular excavation. At KRR 6, the cultural deposit that yielded the Roman amphora, also yielded a local black and red ware sherd with a Tamil-Brahmi inscription Ca-ta-n in character akin to the Pukalur record. Two other inscribed sherds were also found at the upper levels of the same trench, the first one occurring at a depth of 1.85 m with two letters 'Ka-ti' and the other at 2.75 m with four letters i-r-

ku-p. The fragmentary nature of the inscription do not yield meaningful interpretation. The second one, however, is in a somewhat evolved script. Beneath this was found nearly 1.5 m of cultural deposit, yielding only the black and red ware, and the red ware sherds, commonly found in megalithic tombs. At KRR 1, (the Jayaprakash school), a sherd, with inscription on a black and red ware, with just one letter la, showing somewhat an evolved form (with a tendency to curve) was found at a depth of 3.85 meters. Besides, some inscribed sherds with Tamil-Brahmi writings were found as surface collections. Two of them had just one letter each 'a' - 'ya' both with slightly evolved characters. But the third was a small drinking cup of the red slipped variety. The inscription in Tamil Brahmi - reads 'Ku-ra-ka-l'. Kuru akal i.e. the little cup. The characters of 'Ra' and la suggest 2nd-3rd cent. a.d. characters. The cup has a diameter of 6.2 cm.

Among the coins found - two deserve special mention. One was a Roman coin - silver, badly corroded - found at CSI high school ground. It was found at a depth of 52 c.m. almost at the upper levels. Except that it was found in excavation, nothing much could be made out. The other significant find was the square copper coin, with an elephant on the obverse and the bow and arrow on the reverse. It was for the first time that such a coin was found.

The following drawing would give a view of the cultural sequence of the site which are divided into four broad periods. Period 1 represents - the pre-Christian era deposits, of which so far as the limited scope of the excavations is concerned, did not yield Roman artifacts. Period two reveals Roman contact, with amphora, rouletted ware, and black and red ware and the mat design pottery. This represents the first two centuries of the Christian era. This level needs to be carefully noted. The cultural deposit shows, pot sherd with Tamil-Brahmi inscription, akin to the Pukalur record, occurring side by side with rouletted ware and amphora. This also to a certain extent confirms the date of Tamil-Brahmi inscription of the Pukalur record. Though the available materials are inadequate for a very close comparison, they are sufficient enough to indicate the trend. Two types of Tamil-Brahmi sherds are seen - the simple straight line letters and the curving letter. It is the straight lined letters, that are seen in the sherd found in the early layers. So far as Karur is concerned, the Tamil-Brahmi inscriptions occur from the age of Roman contact only.

Overlying the phase yielding amphora, rouletted and inscribed sherds, are seen, the russet coated ware assignable to period III of Karur. The fourth period is characterised by course red ware.

Besides the antiquities mentioned, a brick pavement with a drain was noticed at KRR 1. The structure seemed to be a domestic house site of very moderate dimension.

Notes

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Karur Antiquities



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Gold Signet Ring from Karur

A remarkable signet ring in gold, was found by chance, on the river bed of Amaravati, in Karur in the year 1991(1). It is not only a revelation to the art connoisseurs of the south but also opens up new vistas in the history of Tamil art. The ring weighs 15.6 grams with an oval face measuring 25 m.m. length and 15 m.m. across. On the face of the ring is engraved an amorous couple-mithuna of extraordinary grace and beauty.

The amorous couple portrayed on the face of the ring is truly one of the finest expressions of Indian art. The figures are slim and elongated. The lady in her youth stands with her arm thrown around the shoulders of her lover. Her face turned to the right, tilted down a little, and her hairdo in the dammilla fashion, are expressive of bashfulness, at the approach of her lover. Rounded and prominent breasts adorn her sinuous and graceful body. Her legs, the left firm and steady and the right gently bent across the left - enhances the feminine stance. She is dressed with a thin and fine silken cloth suggested by a flowing thin line, but for which she would almost appear nude. With a few ornaments, there is a beauty in her simplicity, but she does wear bangles, one being pronouncedly big. The supple limbs, delightful poise, the gentle turn of legs, body, neck and face, picturise this lady with perfect feminine modesty.

Her lover stands in a dignified pose, with his right arm hugging the shoulders of his love, while the other arm offers what seem to be a flower. He is obviously delighted at the charm of his love. His right leg is planted straight, while the other, slightly bent, is placed at the back. His physical stature portrays him as a man of classical taste and civility.

The absolutely perfect proportions of the figure, the concept of symmetry as delineated in the legs, face and body, the flowing limbs, the composition and use of space, the remarkably agreeable contours, mark this as one of the most outstanding pieces of Indian art. Above all the emotional context-the intensity of feeling the lovers display, so vividly brought out by the artist, would place him, among the ranks of the foremost of creative genius of 'Ancient India'.

Two other rings of great significance have been recovered from the same river bed in Karur in recent times - one is a gold ring with a legend in Tamil - Brahmi reading Upa(s)an i.e. a lay devotee, and the second a silver ring also with a legend in Tamil-Brahmi characters reading Tittan. The former suggests that it belonged to a merchant who was, judging from the contemporary records, a lay disciple of a Jain monk.

Two gems with figures inscribed on them have been found at Arikamedu(2), again collected as surface finds. One is reported to bear the head of Augustus. This intaglio was sent to the French Museum at Hanoi. The other intaglio bears the figure of Cupid and the eagle and is now in the Bibiliotheque(3), Pondichery. According to Sir Mortimer Wheeler, this gem, a quartz intaglio, is of Greco-Roman workmanship. The untrimmed nature of the gem made Wheeler to suggest that it may have been made locally by a Mediterranean craftsman. This would confirm that Greco-Roman artists were on Tamil soil, a fact mentioned in early Tamil literature as well. That the artists of Arikamedu were in their leisure time executing such carvings is brought to light by two potsherds, both of them being imported rouletted variety. In one, a figure of a standing lady holding a metallic mirror is shown within an oval. The female figure resembles the Karur figure in delineation and is obviously by a local artist. Another sherd carries two figures, one a lion shown within an oval standing in an animated pose and nearby an outline of a lady standing. The find of such potsherds prove atleast two significant points - a) both Indian and Greco-Roman artists were working side by side and b) the artists made use of potsherds to carve such intaglios either as models or to use them as moulds to cast their signet rings. The Arikamedu finds are assigned to the First Century, A.D.

Another important find of gold jewellery and coins comes from a hoard found at Vellalur in Coimbatore district in 1932(4). The hoard yielded gold jewellery along with 121 denarii of Augustus, the Roman Emperor. Four gold rings found here are of great interest. All the four of them were made by Greco-Roman artists. The first one depicts a lion with lifted paw and the other a fish (makara). Among the other two, one represents a lady dressing her hair and the other a dragon, also revealing a head of a Greco-Roman soldier with elaborate headgear. The latter are distinctly by Mediterranean artists. A carnelian stone intaglio with the

figure of a horse has also been found. That this was also intended for a ring is quite evident. Among other jewels found in this hoard may be mentioned pendants in the form of inverted triratnas made of gold, showing indigenous workmanship. Thus the Vellalur hoard, like the Arikamedu finds indicate that Greeco-Roman artists and Indian artists were working together in Tamil Nadu in the First Century A.D.

Another gold jewel revealing, Roman contact comes from Karivalamvandanallur in Tirunelveli District of Tamil Nadu(5). It is a circular pendant with two discs welded together, carrying on one side the head of Ptolemy of Egypt and on the other a jar and a cornucopia with a legend on the periphery, badly mutilated. It was in a hoard with a coin of the Roman ruler Hadrian (118 A.D.). It had reached Indian shores only in the Second Century a.d. According to the British Museum experts who have examined the find, the figures were carved by local craftsmen.

The find of this remarkable signet ring at Karur should be viewed not only against the finds of Roman jewellery in other parts of Tamil Nadu but also against Roman contacts with Karur itself, indicated by the large number of Roman coins found here and also the archaeological context. Among the sites that have yielded hoards of Roman coins in India, it is Karur that has yielded the maximum number. The Roman emperors represented by their coins are Augustus, Tiberius, Claudius and Marcus Aurelius. Several thousand coins have thus been found in Karur alone, among which the majority belong to Tiberius (37 a.d.). A statistical analysis of Roman coins found in South India reveals that most of the coins found in Tamil Nadu belong to the First century a.d., whereas most of the Roman coins found in Andhra were issues of the Second Century a.d. It seems that Roman trade with Karur was at its peak in the First Century a.d.

Roman contact with the Chera capital Karur was at its height in the First Century a.d. The present ring also belongs to this period. The nearest comparison to the present figures in the ring are the Amaravathi sculptures carved in lime-stone under the patronage of the Satavahana emperors(6). A majority of these sculptures are now housed in the Madras Museum and a few in the British Museum. In form, flexion and treatment, the Karur intaglio has much in common with the middle phase of Amaravathi sculptural art

(First Century a.d.). The Amaravathi sculptures are Buddhist in nature and they abound in the portrayal of human figures. The Karur intaglio has a close similarity and yet has an individuality of its own, which may be termed its regional character. Judging from the highly sophisticated portrayal of the forms, it seems that the gold ring from Karur is the work of royal artists working for the Chera rulers. Do the figures in the ring thus represent the Chera and his queen? It is anybody's guess. But that it represents a unique early tradition in Tamil art is unmistakable.

Notes

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Alagankulam, An Indo Roman Trading Port

Alagankulam(1), a village about 20 km from Ramanathapuram, near Ramesvaram in Ramanathapuram District of Tamil Nadu, is situated on the banks of the river Vaigai. It is virtually at the mouth of the river about two kilometres inland from the sea. Originally the sea was skirting the village during ancient times but now has receded far. Now a tiny village Arrankarai is situated on the coast that overlooks the Sri Lankan coast. It is claimed that the opposite side could be reached in about 25 minutes by country boats from this village.

The river Vaigai passes through the city of Madurai, the ancient capital of the Pandyas. It is dry for nearly half of the year and empties itself in a big tank near Ramanathapuram town, and beyond that, the river bed has now dried up totally, only traces of the bed passing through Alagankulam and joining the sea are visible, to show that it ever reached the sea some centuries ago.

However, there are copious reference in the Sangam Tamil literature to this river since it passed through the Pandyan capital Madurai. The Pandyas were called the rulers of the Vaigai, Vaitai Koman, just as the Cholas called the rulers of the Kaveri. The Sangam work Maduraik kanchi(2), calls it a perennial river (line 356). The commentator Naccinarkkiniyar also confirms it. The Tamil epic Silappadhikaram(3) also refers to its perennial nature. It further says that the river fed people of the earth with its various products and provided immense pleasure to those who courted her company. The poets showered praise on her. It is praised as the standard of the Pandyakula, Pandyakulak kodi. Its greatness, particularly its floods which offered the citizens of Madurai to indulge in all the pleasures of water sports comes in for repeated praise in the Paripadal(5) says that the river Vaigai joined the sea. The commentator, Parimelalagar, devotes as many as eight full poems (6, 7, 10, 11, 12, 16, 20 and 22) to this river and the water sports. The Paripadal (No. 11), says that it starts in the Sahyadri mountain, and brings floods in the rainy seasons - Karkalam, (August and September) - when the water used to be muddy. In the Illavenil season (Chittirai and Vaikasi months corresponding to April-May) the waters are clear. There was also water in the winter. From this it is abundantly clear, that the river had waters even at the height of summer.

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By the 12th century a.d. (or even earlier) it had ceased to join the sea. Ottakkuttan, a poet in the court of the Chola emperor Rajaraja II, mentions in his work Takkayagapparani(6) that Vaigai does not join the sea. The learned commentator says that Vaigai is not a Samudragamini i.e., it does not join the sea, but joins the river Pamparu which falls into the sea(7), and had dried up to a great extent.

Excavation

The Tamil Nadu State Department of Archaeology had undertaken excavation at Alagankulam under my direction. The site is now called Kottaimeadu i.e., 'front mound' and extends over one kilometre in diameter. Situated on the northern banks of the dried up river, the outer periphery of the mound is said to contain a brick wall probably a fort wall which has given the name of the site. In spite of the fact that only two trenches laid, the excavation has yielded cultural data of far reaching importance to the study of Indo-Roman trade in the early centuries of the Christian era.

At Alagankulam I, the occupational deposits consisted of about 6 metres or so. Whereas at Alagankulam II, on the slope, the total deposit is 4.75 m. The excavation revealed a continuous occupation without break. It has revealed three distinct groups of ceramics viz.,

- a. The imported wares like Amphora, Rouletted Ware, etc.
- b. The NBP Ware; and the
- c. The local wares.

African ware

Among the imported wares are four distinct types of pottery, viz., (1) Rouletted Ware, (2) Amphora, (3) Late African red slipped ware and (4) Stamped pottery. The Rouletted Ware occurs from the very beginning of occupation and is found upto a depth of 5.10m. The Amphora also occurs from almost the beginning and is found upto a depth of 4.80 m in Alagankulam I. The third type of pottery with a lustrous red surface manufactured from well-levigated clay, with generally a thin cross section, was mistaken by us at first to be the Arretine Ware, known to occur in Arikamedu. I am thankful to Dr. T.N. Potter, of the Department of Prehistoric and Romano-

British antiquities of the British Museum, who identified the pottery as "late African red slipped ware"(8) its probable place of origin being Tunisia. This is the first time that this ceramic has been identified and is noticed in the Indian context and hence important. A few of them have been recognised from the Arikamedu collection in the Pondicherry Museum. Its occurrence in Arikamedu needs to be carefully studied with its bearing on Arikamedu chronology. Its occurrence at Alagankulam seems to be significant. Literally, thousands of sherds of this ware have been collected from a very small area of excavation. The fourth type of imported ware are the stamped pottery. They were also found in Arikamedu and resemble type 10 of Wheeler's report who describes them as a special form of cup or small bowl of grey, greyish pink or Black and Red Ware of fine fabric, usually with a black slip inside and pink outside. It has a flat base and tapering profile and it is ornamented on the interior of the sides with a row of stamped medallions between two rows of multiple incised grooves. The medallions represent fish and birds including peacock. This is one of the characteristic sherds of the site and is occasionally found throughout the occupation of both sectors(9). Many such sherds have been found at Alagankulam, the decorations being mostly birds and peacock. One sherd however, shows a horse rider.

N.B.P. Ware

The second group that deserve special mention is the decidedly N.B.P., the Northern Black Polished Ware. In stratigraphic context it occurs at Alagankulam I from the depth of 2.90 m to a depth of 6 m which shows its use from almost the third century b.c. to the second century a.d. A highly polished black ware was first found also at Korkai during the excavation(10). It was examined by experts from the Survey like Krishnadeva, B.K. Thapar and H. Sarkar who were of the opinion that it is an N.B.P. sherd. Considerable number (more than ten) of sherds occurring at Alagankulam makes it now more than certain that N.B.P. Ware was in use in the extreme south of India. It is now reported, that N.B.P. Wares have been found in Sri Lanka as well.

The indigenous pottery forming the third group, are the Black and Red ware, with mat design, perforated pottery, etc. The Black and Red Ware and mat design pottery are found right from the beginning of occupation. In addition two

potsherds with Tamil Brahmi inscriptions have also been found.

Among other finds mention may be made of beads of fine workmanship, in precious and semi-precious stones. One bead, in the form of nellikai (gooseberry) deserves special mention. Both from surface and excavations, conches used for making bangles were found in various stages of finish and indicate an extensive conch-shell industry. Grooved and perforated tiles were also found. At Alagankulam, a thick deposit of charred earth, conches, timber and potsherds found, indicate a possible burning of the site. The wood identified belong to the palmyra tree.

Roman Coins

The most important finds from excavations for fixing the relative chronology of the site, however, are the two groups of coins: (1) the Roman coins and (2) indigenous coins. Many coins mostly copper, occur in surface also. They are mediaeval coins belonging to Rajaraja Chola and the later Pandyas.

Three Roman copper coins have been found, one is in fairly good state of preservation, while the other two are worn out. One of the worn out coins shows the trace of Roman head. The well preserved coins was found in Alagankulam I between 65 cm and 96 cm. It was encrusted, but after chemical cleaning it was found to be a Roman coin. Coin No. 1 was found at depth of 95 cm, weighing 2 gm but after cleaning its weight was 1.72 gm. It has a diameter of 1.9 cm. Both the coins bear the portrait head of a Roman emperor and a legend running around reading DNVALENTINIAUS-PF-AVGG. On the reverse is the figure of goddess Roma holding a globe in her right hand and a long spear in her left. A legend reading CONCORDIA AVGG is found on the periphery. Beneath the standing figure of the goddess are the legend ANTA, the last letter being worn out. On either of her sides are three symbols-Greek letters. I could recognise the coins at the issue of Valentinian and assigned it to A.D. 375. Subsequently i had the benefit of expert assessment of Dr. Andrew Burnett of the Department of coins and medals of the British Museum, to whom I am thankful for his opinion. The legend on the obverse DN VALENTINIAUS PF AVGG stands DOMINUS MOSTE VALENTIANUS PIOUS FELIX AUGUSTUS - i.e., 'Our Lord Valentinian god blessed Emperor'. The legend on the reverse

CONCORDIA AVGG means 'Concord of Emperors'. The letters of ANTA, stands for the name of mint ANTIOCH in Syria, from where the coins were issued by the Emperor Valentinian. The other three symbols - Greek letters are the mint marks. Valentinian II minted coins at Antioch between a.d. 378 and 383(11).

Local Coins

Two square coins, one a copper and another silver were also found in the excavations. The copper coin was found at a depth of 2.75 m and the silver at 3.30 m. They are, however, very much corroded. The silver coin shows punch marks and thus is a punch-marked coin. An encrusted square copper coin from surface, when cleaned revealed the well-executed elephant with the mangala symbols on the obverse and arrow type of symbol on the reverse. It is too early to come to any conclusion on the evidence of the square coins except to say that they have been found two metres below the Roman coins - of fourth century a.d. and were in circulation, a couple of centuries prior to that date. The Roman coins found at a depth of .95 m would indicate the 4th century a.d. level. A metre below the present surface level at Alagankulam I, which incidentally is the highest point of the mound, is perhaps the level of late Roman contact 400 a.d. Beneath this level, there is a deposit of about 5 m of continuous occupation. If an average of one hundred to one hundred and fifty years are given to one metre of deposit as taken by Wheeler at Arikamedu(12), the occupation of the site goes back to c. 3rd century b.c. The site was obviously abandoned around 600 a.d. which may be attributed to: (a) decline of foreign trade and (b) the drying up of the river Vaigai as mentioned earlier. The occurrence of the Valentinian Roman coins of 380 a.d. throws fresh light on the economic and commercial history of Tamil Nadu. For the first time they have been found here.

Roman trade

The Roman coins so far reported from Tamil Nadu may be divided into two broad categories. The first is assignable to the first two centuries of the Christian era ending with Septimus Severus around 200 a.d. after which is a break. The second category occurs between 300 a.d. to 450 a.d. from the reign of Diocletian (a.d. 295) to Theodosius II (402-450 a.d.). Not many coins issued between 200 a.d. and 300 a.d. have been found so far. At present it is

difficult to explain, but contrary to earlier views the trade between Tamil Nadu and the Roman empire, did not cease but continued in the 4th and 5th century a.d. perhaps with greater vigour. Roman coins of the 4th century have been found in the following places.

1. Diocletian 305 a.d. Thanjavur
2. Theodosius 395 a.d. Mamallapuram
3. Theodosius 395 a.d. Kulattupalayam Honorius & Arcadius 400 a.d. Madurai

Theodosius II 450 a.d. Pudankavur (Kerala).

To this may be added three more sites. The first is Alagankulam, which has yielded Valentinian coins. Three coins were noticed from Thirukkoyilur of which one carries a Cross on the reverse(13). (About the remarkable recent find of Roman coins from Thirukkoyilur see under Roman coins). Among the other two - one shows on the reverse a standing emperor and a goddess crowning him. The other shows three standing emperor and a goddess crowning him. The other shows three standing figures, the central one being shorter. A legend reads GLOR ROMA. The Christian religious symbol cross was first introduced by the Roman emperor Constantine, the Great around 330 a.d. These coins seem to have been issued in 4th century. Mr. Iravatham Mahadevan, had a collection of coins (which he presented to the National Museum, New Delhi) tells me that his collection included two coins, both copper, one of Theodosius and another of Constantine. Both are said to come from Perur near Coimbatore and the latter carries a cross at the back. In this connection, a few new finds in Andhra and karnataka may also be noticed. About 43 gold coins have been found in the village Akki Allur in Dharwar district of Karnataka. The coins include issues of Roman rulers beginning with Theodosius II (402-450 a.d.) and ending with Justinus (518-527 a.d.) and include rulers like Marcian, Leo I, Zeno and Anastinus. The coins reached India obviously around 525 a.d. and the issues of earlier rulers were included and were used for making jewellery(14). A coin of Constantine (353 a.d.) and another of Anastinus (500 a.d.) were found in Kondavilli in Mehboobnagar district of Andhra Pradesh(15). Most of the Roman coins found in Sri Lanka belong to the 4th and 5th century a.d. and hardly any before Nero, as listed by Wheeler(16). Only one hoard coins of Nero and Vespasian

had been found. All others are later coins. Coins of Valentinian II, have been found at Pidarikulam in Sri Lanka. Warmington suggests that 'Greek merchants were generally content to find the products of Sri Lanka in the marts of the West Coasts of India without visiting the island itself. Few coins have been found, certainly dating before Nero and even after him only about a dozen dating before the end of the second century(17). This would show that coastal trade round the Cape Comorin, was active not in the first century a.d. but in the 4th-5th century a.d. Wheeler's list of Roman coins would show that most of them were found as hoards and contained the issues of more than one ruler.

The earliest Roman coin is that of Emperor Augustus 31 b.c. to 14 a.d. It is towards the end of the reign of Augustus, contact between the Tamils and the Roman empire, is recorded. Even then trade and contact remained along the West coast, keeping the land and its vicinity and through middlemen. No Roman coin seems to have reached the Tamil land, before the Christian era. In all probability they reached the Tamil kingdoms in the reign of Tiberius, in whose time there was a great increase in trade. The coins of Tiberius in gold after the establishment of direct trade between the Roman world and the Tamil Kingdoms, as a result of the discovery of the monsoon by Hippalus, Roman artifacts are found in increasing number in the Tamil soil. Though Romans themselves never seemed to have reached the Tamil kingdom it is the Greco Romans from Egypt who represented them. Hence for the identification of the imported pottery found in Roman context in Tamil Nadu, one has to look to Egypt. The identification of the red slipped ware as the African red ware thus confirms that they were brought by the Egyptian Greco Romans. Several of the African Red slipped ware show rouletation.

Regarding the Rouletted Ware, Vimala Begley suggests: (19) (a) that the Rouletted Ware - trade was coastal and in southern regions of the Peninsula and (b) that Rouletted Ware evolved at Arikamedu which produced the ware on a large scale both for domestic use and trade. Citing the occurrence of Rouletted Ware at inland sites (Brahmagiri, Candravalli, Maski, Kondapur, and Amaravati in Andhra and also at Sisupalgarh) Warmington suggest that 'the Rouletted Wares found in India came from the West'(20). Wheeler and others also suggested the western origin of the Rouletted Ware, especially the finer varieties. Arikamedu

has yielded them from the very beginning of the occupation. So any suggestion, that it evolved at Arikamedu, is not convincing. The discovery of other sites like Alagankulam, with Rouletted Ware occurring also from the very beginning would preclude Arikamedu as the source of manufacture. There are however two varieties, one imported and the other local, of inferior workmanship. The excavation at Alagankulam has shown that Rouletted Ware continued to be used upto 4th century A.D. or so.

Reconsidering the date of Arikamedu, Vimala Begley(21) starts with the assumption that the Brahmi script was introduced into the Tamil country in the 3rd-2nd century b.c. She considers the Black-and-Red Ware sherd with a five letter inscription in early Brahmi script at some length and holds this as the earliest inscription at Arikamedu and so dates phase A of Arikamedu to mid 300-200 b.c. I have shown that the adoption of Brahmi to Tamil language could have taken place around 1st century b.c. only and not in 3rd century b.c.(22) Apart from my views, the Brahmi sherd from Arikamedu may be examined in the light of chronology suggested by I. Mahadevan. The inscribed sherd from Arikamedu, taken by Vimala Begley as the basis for her dating is clearly in Tamil language. I. Mahadevan himself holds that the earliest Tamil brahmi inscription-his early period-dates only from 2nd century b.c. and not 3rd century b.c. Secondly in his early phase, the medial a sign is shown by a horizontal line on top of the letters which he holds as the most distinctive feature(23) In the illustration chosen by Vimala Begley the script does not show this early feature. It means, even according to I. Mahadevan's chronology, the Arikamedu sherd, assignable to Phase A, can at best belong only to 1st century a.d. and not earlier. This would indicate that Wheeler's dating of the site to the end of 1st century b.c. or the beginning of the Christian era, with a preference towards the latter seems to hold good. The other sherds that Vimala assigns to 1st century a.d. could as well belong to 2nd century a.d. as it shows evolved characters and are close to the 2nd century Amaravati letters. Since this inscription is in Prakrit, a close comparison is feasible.

With the discovery of Alagankulam, indicating profuse Roman contacts in the later period, the centre of attraction now shifts to the Pandyan Kingdom. Situated on the river Vaigai, the river of the Pandyas, it is tempting to identify the site with Saliyur, mentioned in the accounts of the

classical geographers. 'The farfamed Saliyur (Selur, Salur, Delur in Ptolemy) opposite the north end of Ceylon, was a similar mart evercrowded with ships which had crossed the dangerous ocean and from which costly wares were landed(24).

Further excavations would reveal more evidence on Indo-Roman trade particularly in the 4th-5th centuries a.d. African red-slipped ware seems to have been found always with Arretine, amphora, and rouletted dishes(25).

Warmington suggested that the Roman gold and silver coins wre imported into India, for creating a currency but later he revised his opinion(26). 'Although there was no native currency of gold and hardly any of silver in all Peninsular India, the natural explanation of the hoards before they wre banked or lost in some way, is not the desire to create a Roman currency, but provision of bullion to be weighed against articles of commerce to be exchanged, each hoard being probably a unit or set of unit, each unit being the sum paid for a set of articles. The slashing of the coins in six or more of the hoards must have had as its object cancellation by Indians to put the coins out of any sort of circulation".

Romans coins have been found in large numbers in and near Coimbatore. They point: (1) active overland trade between the Malabar coast and the eastern coast at Arikamedu via Coimbatore (Palghat) gap thus avoiding the sea voyage round cape Comorin and (2) to a natural concentration of the trade of the three Tamil Kingdoms in Coimbatore District. Among the two inscribed sherds found at Alagankulam - one is a surface find and the other occurs from the excavations. Both belong to the imported Rouletted variety. The inscriptions are in Tamil language and in Tamil Brahmi script. They are scratched after firing betray irregular hand.

The first one - a surface find is a red Rouletted sherd and has six letters. The first two are indistinct. It is possible, a few more letters at the beginning are missing. The last four letters are very clear and read - 'Ti-ca-a-n'. The last two letters nominate masculine singular suffix. It probably gives the name of a person and may indicate the owner of the vessel - 'Tican'. The use of the word 'an' - also indicate an orthographical peculiarity. Such usages are found in early Tamil Brahmi inscriptions in places like Meenakshipuram (Mangulam). Such usages are assigned to the early period

of Tamil Brahmi and dates to 2nd-1st century b.c. by I. Mahadevan. The sherd thus may be assigned to 1st century b.c. The second sherd was found at the depth of 4.10 m. The inscription is on a black Rouletted sherd. Interestingly the letters are inscribed, keeping the rim upside down. There are five letters - reading PI-TI-U-RA-Y, which seems to be complete. It may be translated as 'handle cover'. Probably the lid plate was used as a lid and is assignable to the beginning of the Christian era.

Tamil Brahmi inscriptions have been found in the Pandyan country from the beginning of first century b.c. The present find is a pointer to the importance of the site(27).

Notes

1. Nagaswamy, R., *Alagankulam on Indo-Roman Trading Port*.
2. *Maduraikkanchi in 'Patthu Pattu'*, Dr. U.V. Swaminatha Iyer, (ed.) Madras, line 356.
3. *Silappadhikaram*, U.V. Swaminatha Iyer, Madras, 13 lines 150-175.
4. *Paripadal*, Dr. U.V. Swaminatha Iyer, ed. Madras, 1956.
5. *Paripadal*, *ibid.*, No. 10., lines 1 and 'Malaivaraimalai alipeyal kalai chelavarailk kanak kadalarikuda' Commentary of Parimelagar, *ibid.*, pp. 100;
6. *'Vaigaiyanatu Vellarrudan Kadalodu Kalakkum Poruttu'*.
7. *Takkayagap-parani*, Dr. U.V. Swaminatha Iyer, (ed.) Madras, 1960, verse 212.
8. *'Vaikaiyudan Bhavidinum Kadal Pukkanave'*.
9. *Ibid.*, p.87, *Vaigaiyanadu Samudragamini alla Pamparruk kadalodu kadal pukkadena unarka*.
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24. Nagaswamy, R., *the origin of Brahmi Script in Gupta
S.P. and Ramachandran, K.S. (ed.) Delhi, 1979,
p.83.*
25. Mahadevan, I., *Tamil-Brahmi inscriptions in
'Seminar on Inscriptions', Nagaswamy, R. (ed.)
Madras, 1968, p.58.*
26. Warmington, *op. cit.*, p.62.
27. *Ibid.*, p.394.
28. *Ibid.*, p.394.
29. *Alagankulam site was first noticed by the Tamil Nadu
State Department of Archaeology in the year 1982.
Thiru Sampath, Curator and Thiru. Karunanandan,
Curator, explored the site and discovered Rouletted
Ware, Black and Red Ware, the red ware, the African
red slipped ware, beads, and conch shells used for
making bangles.*

Epigraphical Evidence The Sangam Age Cheras



Roman Karur
R. Nagaswamy

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Karur Inscribed Sherds

The earliest epigraphs so far found at Karur are the inscribed potsherds found in the excavation. Written in Tamil-Brahmi script, they are too fragmentary. It has been mentioned earlier that two phases of writings are noticed in the potsherds - the first, and the earliest are found in layers denoting Roman contact. The script carries straight lined letters, very much similar to the Pukalur records. The second found in the upper layers show the tendency to curve, denoting a century or more of evolution. They also show that Karur had a continuous occupation.

Pukalur Chera records

At this stage it may be useful to study the Tamil-Brahmi inscription on the Arnattar hill at Pukalur(1). Pukalur is a village about 10 k.m. from Karur town. Situated on the banks of the river Kaveri, it has a hillock called Arnattar malai. There is a Subrahmanya temple on top of the hill. The hamlet beneath the hill is now called Velayudhanpalayam, after the name of the Subrahmanya temple. The hillock runs east-west. At the back of the hill there are natural caverns have rock-cut beds, provided for ascetics. An inscription in Tamil-Brahmi script is found on the rock bed on the northern face reading : Nakan makan Perunkiran i.e. Perumkiran (the donor of the bed) son of Nakan.

On the southern face, inscriptions in Tamil-Brahmi script are found both on the rock-beds and on the overhanging rock above. The following are the two inscriptions, found on the overhanging rocks.

*Muta Amannan Yarrur Cenkayapan ... Ko Atan
...lirumpurai Makan Perum Katunkon Makan Katunkon
lankon lank Aki arupita Kal.*
*Muta Amannan Yarrur Cenkayapan Urai, Ko Atan
Cellirumporai Makan Perum Katunkon Makan lankatuno
lanko aki arutta Kal.*

It may be seen that both the inscriptions carry the same content and record that, 'Ilamkatunko', son of Perumkatunko, who was the son of Ko Atan Cel Irumporai, got these beds ut as the abode of an Amana, the Elder

Cenkayapan of Yarrur. The gift was made when Ilankatunko was made Ilanko-'Crown Prince'. The term 'Ko' suggests that this is a royal family. The names Atan Cel Irumporai clearly show that the Kings mentioned in the record are the Cheras. Thus the record mentions three generations of the Chera line: Ko Atan Cel Irumporai his son - Perumkatunko and his son - Katunko Ilanko.

There are a number of other inscriptions on the rock beds in the cavern, one repeats the same found on the overhanging rock. Though it is somewhat damaged it clearly repeats what is found in the other two inscriptions and records.

3. Yarrur Cenkayapan Atittanam - i.e. This is the atittanam of Cenkayapan of Yarrur.

Some of the other inscriptions are damaged. Leaving out the badly damaged record other inscriptions are given below.

4. Vanikan. i.e. The merchant.

5. Atan atittanam i.e. the abode of Atan.

6. Korrantai-laiya munru i.e. The sacred abode of Korrantai Ilaiyan.

7. Karuvur Pon Vanikan Natti atittanam i.e. The abode of gold merchant Natti of Karur.

8. Nallipi-ur-a-Pitantai mala Kiran korra i.e. Kiran korra the daughter of Pitantai from Nallipiur.

9. Nalpi ur a Pitam Kurum makal Kirannori Ceyipita pali. The cemetery caused to be made by Kirannori, the younger daughter of Pitam from Nalpiur.

From the above records the following points may be noted.

a) That a gold merchant from Karuvur is mentioned.

b) The following proper names are also mentioned: Pittan, Korran, Kiran, Ori, Atan.

We have seen that the main abode was made by the Chera crown prince. Ilankatunko, that a gold merchant from Karur is also mentioned and that Karur is hardly 10 kilometers from here. That Karur as the capital of the Cheras is mentioned through the centuries in other records is known. This record proves beyond doubt that Karur which is nearby, was the capital of the Cheras Ko-Atan-Cel-

Irumporai, Perumkatunko and Ilamkatunko.

From the excavated inscribed pottery, the Pukalur record is to be assigned to the age of Roman contact that is first cent. a.d., and the three Chera rulers mentioned in the record lived in the first cent. a.d. This correlation is of great interest which will be discussed in the sequence.

Notes

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Satyaputra Inscription



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The reference of Kollippurai and Makkotai in the coins, and the three generations of Chera rulers at Pukalur, need to be studied in the light of 'Satyaputra inscription, newly found(1).

The inscription is found on a rock inside a cavern, on the hillock of Jambai, a village in South Arcot district, Tamil Nadu. The village is 15 k.m. away from Thirukkkoilur town and can be reached by a motorable road. The epigraph is in Tamil (except for the title in Prakrit) and reads:

Satiyaputo Atiyan Natuman Anci itta Pali

The meaning of the epigraph may be rendered as 'The abode (pali) given by (itta) Atiyan Neduman Anci (name), the Satyaputra (title)'. Though the record is a short one in a single line, it throws valuable light on various aspects of South Indian history. The title, the name of the chief and the spot, all contribute greatly to the early history of the Tamils(2).

The inscription is in Tamil-Brahmi script found in early Tamil epigraphs. It is now well established that the earliest known Tamil and Ceylonese scripts are derived from the Brahmi script employed by the Mauryan Emperor Asoka(3).

It is interesting to note that in the recently found record, both the northern Brahmi letter sa and the Tamil-Brahmi letter Li have been used.

The inscription clears the doubt about the identity of the Satyaputras, a dynasty of rulers, mentioned in Asoka's inscriptions in the 3rd century b.c. This great Mauryan Emperor, in his rock edicts, mentions a number of contemporary rulers among whom figures 'Satiyaputra'(4). In his Girnar rock edict II, Asoka details the arrangements made by him within his empire and also beyond its borders:

'Everywhere in the conquered dominions of king Priyadarsin, the beloved of the gods, and the dominions on the borders as those of the Chola, the Pandya, the Satiyaputra, the Keralaputra, Tamraparni, the Yavana King named Antiyoka and the other neighbouring kings of this Antiyoka, (Ye Ca anta ata Choda, Pandiya, Satiyaputo, Kelalaputo, Tambapanni, Antiyogo nama Yonalaja) two

kinds of medical treatment were established by king Priyadarsin, the beloved of the gods viz. Medical treatment for human beings and medical treatment for cattle'.

The Satiyaputras are placed, it may be seen, among the Cheras, the Pandyas and the Keralaputras. While the countries of the Cholas, the Pandyas and the Keralaputras are well known, the identity of the Satyaputras was the subject of controversy among scholars. Some identified the Satyaputras with the Satavahanas, while others identified them with the Satputas of Maharashtra. Still other scholars located their country in northern Kerala. But judging from the way Asoka mentions them the Cholas, the Pandyas and also the Keralaputras, and the fact that they were outside the domain of Asoka's rule, it was suggested by some scholars that they should be identified with one or other of the known rulers of the Tamil land.

In early Tamil literature, a clan of people named Kossar(5), known for their honesty and trustworthiness (Satya), are referred to and they were considered the Satyaputras of the Asokan edict. But the Atiyamans were also equated with the Satyaputras by K.G. Seshu Aiyer, Burrow and the great historian, K.A. Nilakanta Sastri(6). In the Jambai epigraph, the title Satiyaputo is given to the Atiyaman chief, thus setting at rest once and for all the controversy about the identity of the Satyaputra rulers of the Asokan edicts with the Atiyaman chiefs, rulers of a part of the Tamil country.

The Jambai record is somewhat later than the Asokan period, which indicates that the line of Atiya chiefs held sway over a part of the Kongu country from the 3rd century b.c. to the 1st century a.d. and were powerful enough to be listed by Asoka on par with the Cholas, the Cheras and the Pandyas of the Tamil land. On grounds of paleography and other contemporary records, the Jambai record has to be placed in the first century a.d.

In the early Tamil Sangam literature a number of rulers of Tamil land are mentioned and several historical episodes are recorded.

Among the rulers of the Sangam age, Atiyaman Neduman Anci is celebrated in the Tamil classics by eminent poets like Paranar(7) and Avvaiyar(8). Avvaiyar, the greatest Tamil poetess, was a very close friend of Atiyaman Neduman Anci, and has left several poems on him. He had his capital at Takatur, the modern Dharmapuri, in northern

Tamilnadu. Anci was the leader of the Malavars against whom no enemy could prevail. His ardour for battle and heroism in war form the themes of many poems.

Avvaiyar describes at some length Atiyan's arms(9) and power, swords, spears, elephants and infantry and advised his foes to submit and pay tributes to him if they hope to escape disaster. Once Avvaiyar went on an embassy to Tondaiman on behalf of Atiyan; when Tondaiman showed her around his arsenal, the poetess confessed with subtle sarcasm, that the arsenal of her chief was full of rusty, broken and blood-stained weapons. She implied that while Atiyaman made victorious use of his weapons on battle fields, Tondaiman merely exhibited them for show!(10)

Atiyan belonged to a family whose ancestors were great performers of Vedic sacrifices and devout worshippers of gods(11). An ancestor of Atiyan is said to have introduced sugarcane cultivation from the celestial regions to earth. Atiyan himself was a noted patron of poets whose palace gates usually remained open for wandering minstrels. Once he got a rare myrobalan fruit which made the individual who ate it immortal(12). Instead of eating it himself, he presented the fruit to the poetess and the grateful bard celebrates this noble gesture of Atiyan in a poem, expressing the wish that her patron, Atiyaman Anci, should live forever, like Lord Siva who swallowed the deadly poison himself and gave the deathless ambrosia to this world. This great act of Atiyaman is praised in several Tamil verses of both the early and mediaeval periods, so much so that the very name Atiyan came to mean liberality.

Among his conquests, two victories come in for special praise. Atiyan single handedly met the confederacy of seven rulers and won a signal victory(13). Avvai states that there was no poet who was capable of giving a verbal description of this battle and the valour of Atiyan. The second victory relates to the capture of Thirukkoilur by Atiyan, a conquest praised by no less a poet than Parinar of the Sangam age(14). The poetess herself mentions that this conquest was sung by Parinar.

In the end, Atiyam himself was besieged in his own fort at Takadur by the Chera king Perum Cheral Irumporai, who ultimately captured it(15). This Perum Cheral Irumporai, the victor of Takadur, is probably identical with Adan Cheral Irumporai, the first king mentioned in the Pukalur record. The Jambai record is contemporaneous with the

Pukalur inscription. A long Tamil poem, Takadur Yattirai(16), surviving only in parts, celebrates the conquest of Takadur by Perum Cheral Irumporai. Atiyan fell in a battle pierced by a spear of his opponent. Avvai gives an eyewitness account of the fall of Atiyan(17). His body was consigned to flames and Avvai, visibly moved by the scene, has a poem on the cremation(18). Later a memorial stone (dolemnoid cist erected in honour of warriors who met with heroic death), was erected to this great ruler(19). Ever since, the name Atiyan was always associated with the poetess Avvaiyar who is much venerated in Tamil Nadu.

The discovery of the inscription of Atiyaman Neduman Anci recording his own gift has proved his historicity and its location near Thirukoilur, attests to his conquest of that town about 80 k.m. from his capital, Takadur. The gift was made by Atiyan obviously when this territory was under his control. The early Sangam poetry describes Atiyan as a great Saivite(20) but the fact that he has gifted a abode to a jaina ascetic shows the religious tolerance of the age.

The Satyaputra inscription should be studied in relation to the Kollippurai coin. The Satyaputra inscription mentions specifically the name of Atiyan Neduman Anci and it occurs near Thirukkoyilur, the seat of Malaiyaman Thirumudi Kari, another chief of the Sangam age(21). Thirumudikkari was a great friend of the Chera - Perumcheral Irumporai. The occurrence of Atiya Neduman Anci's inscription shows, Kari suffered a defeat initially at the hands of Atiya, a fact also mentioned by Avvaiyyar in the Sangam poems. He seems to have obtained the help of the Chera. At the same time, Val Vil Ori, a chieftain of Kolli hills antagonised the Chera, by aligning himself with the other two kings-the Chola and the Pandya; Atiya also joined this confederacy. The Chera and Kari on one side and the other four on the opposing side, fought a severe battle at Nirukur(22). The Chola and the Pandya were utterly routed and escaped for their life leaving their royal umbrellas and drums on the field, which were captured by the Chera. Thirumudikkari chased Val Vil Ori, engaged him in a battle, killed him, captured the Kolli hills and handed it over to the Chera. Ever since, the Chera, Perum Cheral Irumporai came to be called, the Irumporai of Kolli hills. He chased Atiya to his capital Takadur where he was besieged and finally killed. The Satyaputra Atiya inscription of Jambai, is chronologically earlier to the Kollippurai coin. It should be considered co-eval with the

Pukalur record. However these two inscriptions, the Pukalur and Jambai, and also the Kollippurai coin are separated hardly by five or ten years. What is here emphasized is only their chronological sequence.

Karur Hero Stones

Two hero stone inscriptions were noticed at Karur by the Tamil Nadu State Archaeology Department, both assignable to 8th-9th cent. a.d.(23). One is in Tamil language written in Tamil script reading Ko Kaliyan Makan Karuvuridai Tan anirai Kolal vilndu Pattan. The stone (memorial) of son of Kaliyan, who fell rescuing his cattle, (that were being carried away) at Kuruvur. The second one also in Tamil language but in Vatteluttu is somewhat damaged, but the first three lines which are seen clearly record Vanci Vel atiyen - the servant of Vanci Vel. These two herostones show that Karur, was known as both Vanci and Karur in the 9th cent.

Notes

1. Nagaswamy, R., *Asoka and the Tamil Country, A new link, Indian Express, 6-12-1981.*
2. *Ibid.* This inscription was noticed first by my student Sri Selvaraj who undertook Jambai village for his research project. The chief Epigraphist initially brushed aside this find as spurious. Subsequent excavations have brought to light rock beds as in other caverns, found beneath a thick deposit of earth. The Satyaputra inscription could no more be doubted.
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4. Radha Kumud Mukherjee, *Chandra Gupta Maurya and his times, Delhi, 4th edition, 1966, p. 75.*
5. Mahadevan, I., *Proceedings of the world Tamil Conference, 1968.*
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7. *Puram 99.*
8. *ibid., 101.*
9. *ibid., 93, 95.*
10. *ibid., 95.*
11. *ibid., 99.*
12. *ibid., 91.*

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13. *ibid.*, 99.
 14. *ibid.*, 99.
 15. *Pantirru pattu, patikam*, 8.
 16. Nilakanta Sastri, K.A., *A history of South India*, Madras, 1977, p.125.
 17. *Puram* 235.
 18. *ibid.*, 231.
 19. *ibid.*, 232.
 20. *ibid.*, 91.
 21. *ibid.*, 121-124, 126, 158.
 22. *Patirru Pattu, patikam*, 8.
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Literary Evidence

Karur And/Or Vanci Capital Of The Sangam Age Cheras

This chapter deals with 1) The identity of Karur as the capital of the Sangam age Cheras 2) The relative chronology of the Sangam age Cheras, 3) Indo-Roman contact as reflected in Tamil literature and 4) The date of the Sangam classics.

Karur and Vanci

Whether Karur in Trichy district was identical with Vanci, the capital of the Cheras of the Sangam age, was a matter of great debate among scholars like Krishnaswami Ayyangar(1), Sesha Aiyer(2), K.A.N. Sastri(3) and others. So far as the literary evidences are concerned, the most remarkable analysis was published by Pandit R.Raghava Aiyangar in his book Vanci Managar (Madras) 1932(4). This outstanding scholar, deeply rooted in traditional studies, had a brilliant command over historical methodology and has marshalled all references to Karur and Vanci from Tamil literature both ancient and mediaeval and presented the view that all references overwhelmingly point to Karur in Trichy district, as the capital of the Sangam age Cheras, and that it also had the name Vanci in ancient times. Raghava Aiyangar's work is so systematic and convincing, the opposing views held by Krishnaswami Ayyengar and K.G. Sesha Aiyer are no more valid.

In his work 'Chera kings of the Sangam age' Sesha Aiyer has discussed the problem of the identity of Karur with Vanci in detail. A careful study of his work would reveal that he was writing with a predetermined conclusion, as a result there are a number of self contradictory statements such as:-

Karur is not a proper name at all (p.82) Karur and Vanci are two different places (p.82) Karur and Vanci are identical (p.90) Though Vanci is Karur, it is not the same town in Trichy district. Karur was established as the seat of viceroyalty but its capital was in Tondi in west coast. (p.83) Karur and Musiri are identical. These are nothing but contradictions.

The salient points of Raghava Aiyangar's work may be recounted here.

1. The river Anporunai is identical with the Amaravati river, on the banks of which Karur is situated.
2. Kongu Nadu, the mountain Kolli, the river Anporunai, and Karur are prominently and frequently referred to in association with the Cheras.
3. The Aham poem 93, mentions Karur as the capital of the Chera Kodai. 'Katum pakattu yanai Netum ter Kotai Thiru maviyan nagar Karuvur'.

The Aham 263, mentions Vanci as the capital of the Chera Kotai, 'Olir vel Kotai Ompi Kakkum Vancci', which makes it evident Vanci and Karur are identical.

4. The commentators of Purappatu, and Arumpadavurai on Silappadhikaram specifically state that Karur is Vanci. Since Karur was the popular name, and Vanci more a literary word, wherever Vanci occurred, they stated that it referred to Karur.

5. The Ptolemy mentions Karur as an inland capital.

6. Vanci is the name of a tree and also a creeper. It is mentioned as Vaidasam or Vanira in Sanskrit. Bhavabhuti refers to Vanjula. The name Vanci, ascribed to the capital of the Cheras is after this creeper.

7. All the Nighantu's equate the city of Vanci with Karur.

8. The Cheras were controlling Kuta Nadu, Kutta Nadu, Malai Nadu, Puli Nadu, and Kongu Nadu.

9. All the literature down through the centuries take the name Vanci to refer to Karur. (Pandit Aiyangar has cited extensively from early and mediaeval literature to substantiate these points).

10. One or two writers like Atiyarkku nallar, according to Raghava Aiyangar, have confused the location of this city.

Raghava Aiyangar's work can hardly be excelled.

The crucial references to identify Karur with Vanci are Aham 93, Puram 36 and Silappadhikaram. The following points may be noted in this regard.

Aham 93 states that Karur, the capital of the Chera, was on the banks of Anporunai river. Puram 36, states that the capital of the Chera was on the banks of Anporunai. The ancient colophon mentions this as Karuvur.

Silappadhikaram also refers to the Chera Senguttuvan as the ruler of Anporunai river(5).

There are several other references which need not be gone into here. It has been shown that two newly found herostones from Karur, assignable to 8th-9th cent a.d. also prove that Vanci and Karur are identical. Mediaeval Chola inscriptions near Karur (at Nerur) specifically state-Vanci Managar alias Karuvur. We have shown that the Pukalur inscriptions in early Tamil Brahmi characters, refer to Karuvur gold merchant, and three generations of Chera rulers. It seems to us that literary references confirm what we know from other evidences, that the Modern Karur in Trihy district was the capital of the Cheras of the Sangam age. When the Cheras were pushed out of Karur, after the establishment of the Pallava power in the region in the 6th cent a.d., they shifted their capital to the western coast and gave the names of their ancestral capital to new places. This took a couple of centuries to get recognition. So references to Vanci and Karur as also being in the West Coast, begin to occur from 12th cent a.d.

Chronology of the Chera Kings

The chronology of the Sangam age Cheras as gleaned from Tamil literature has been discussed by earlier writers like Prof.Sastri(6). This aspect need not be discussed here in detail. It is known that, the Cheras were referred to as Kerala putras in the Asokan record. We know very little about the Chera rulers of that time. When we come to the Sangam poems, the collation of different patrons and poets suggest about six generations of rulers and that too in the context of the Yavanas, the Romans. We have shown that this could be placed only in the first two centuries of the Christian era.

The Chera rulers have to be accommodated in a chronological frame work within these two centuries. We have also shown that Kollippurai, the issuer of the coin was by a few years anterior to Makkotai. The chronology of other rulers have been discussed by Prof. Sastri.

The Tamil literary evidence regarding Indo-Roman contact is studied in the chapter on Romans in Tamilnad.

Date of Sangam Classics

This study has also an important bearing on the dating of the Sangam Tamil Literature. Elaborate discussions re

available on the Gajabahu synchronism, considered to be the sheet anchor of dating Sangam classics. Even in his latest book on 'Companion studies to Tamil Literature' - Kamil Zvelebil deals very elaborately on this point. Without entering into all the points raised, we may say Gajabahu synchronism is no more the pivotal mentioning the three Chera rulers, did rightly assume the most important position in dating the Sangam literature. The occurrence of names found in Sangam literature, mentioned in Tamil Brahmi records enlivened the correlation and dating. And yet the dating of Tamil Brahmi records was mainly dependent on paleographical evaluation and the chronology assigned was only an approximation, and had the inbuilt weakness of subjective approach. Though archaeological excavations at Arikkamedu could have helped stratigraphically to give a relative chronology to the Tamil Brahmi script, Wheeler's report unfortunately did not give the required scientific data of stratigraphical sequence to the inscribed sherds. Under these circumstances, the dating of Tamil Brahmi script, was far more valuable than the Gajabahu synchronism.

However, the present numismatic discoveries of Kollippuraiyan and Makkotai, issued in imitation of Roman coins (which arrived in the Tamil country only in the first cent. a.d.) has adduced one clinching evidence, that the Sangam corpus belong to the post christian era and none to the pre-Christian era. The numismatic evidence now is of utmost importance. Further it has been shown earlier that inscribed potsherds with Tamil Brahmi legends have been found in the archaeological excavation at Karur. The script found on them show close affinity to the Pukalur record. Stratigraphically, the Karur inscribed sherds were found in layers yielding Roman potsherds. They could therefore be assigned to the first century a.d. That also gives a far more closer data to Pukalur record as first cent a.d. All these new materials confirm that the Sangam corpus could only be placed in the first two centuries of the Christian era and not earlier.

Notes

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4. *Raghava Aiyangar, R., Vanci Managar, Madras, 1932.*
5. *Silappadhikaram, Ibid. 20, 14-3.*
6. *Nilakanta Sastri, K.A., Ibid.*

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Tamil Roman Contact

The Tamil literary evidence regarding Indo Roman contact is of great value to the present study. It is proposed to take the Pattupattu and Ettu tokai anthologies and the twin epics Silappadhikaram and Manimekhalai and the later epics Cintamani and Perumkatai for this study.

It is seen that there are six references in Sangam anthologies to Yavanas, three in the Ettuttokai collections and there in Pattu Pattu collections. Interestingly each reference gives one aspect of Yavana contact, and when all of them are put together collectively, indicate Indo Roman contact.

Aham 149, mentions the ships of Yavanas, frequenting the port of Mustri on the banks of Periyaru, coming laden with gold and returning with pepper. It is not known whether the Yavanas - the Romans brought lumps of gold. In all likelihood not. On the contrary it is the Roman coins they brought for its bullion value. This passage then seems to confirm that Roman coins at the beginning were brought to the south, mainly for their metal value and not as currency.

The second reference comes from Puram poem 56. The ruler, in this case the Pandya Nan Maran, is praised for drinking wine daily in a gold cup, filled by beautiful damsels. The delicious wine was supplied by the Yavanas in well made jars. This stanza shows that the Romans brought good wines in well made jars, obviously a reference to amphora jars found in large numbers in archaeological excavations in Tamil Nad. It also shows that the Tamil Kings rated the Roman wines very high, to be celebrated in poems and that they were drinking Roman wines daily, poured by good looking damsels.

The third reference is to Roman lamps- Nedunalvadai, lines 101-2, mentions beautiful figures, holding lamps in their hands, made by the Yavanas which were used as lights for illumination by the pandyan ruler.

The occurrence of Roman terracotta and bronze lamps in different archaeological context in South India confirms this literary reference. Another Sangam poem also confirms the great appreciation of the Tamils for the Roman lamps(1). The Romans are said to light and place their lamps in the

shape of a black swan on the Yupa sthambhas, planted in places where the learned Brahmins performed Vedic sacrifices(2). The 'black - swan' seems to refer to bronze lamps in the shape of a swan.

The other reference to Yavanas(3) relates to their dress and their services as body guards of the king. They had by nature very sturdy bodies, which they covered with shields, giving a fearful appearance. They also carried a whip, to drive their horses, which they covered with their lower garments. The Romans as body guards had a terrifying look.

The last of the reference, relates to the capture of Romans by Nedum Cheral Adan(4). He caught them, tied their hands behind, and poured molten ghee over their heads and captured their costly vessels with precious diamonds. The reason for inflicting such a treatment is not given. Probably they transgressed the law of the land in some ways and received the punishment. This would show, the Romans were also punished by the rulers. The stanza seems to indicate that the Romans, used barbaric language and were quarrelsome. The last sentence may indicate ships with diamonds. Probably they did not pay duties levied on such commodities.

The Yavanas so mentioned, were in all probability Romans and these literary references are authenticated by archaeological finds like, amphora wine jars, Roman lamps, Roman gold and silver coins, and classical references to their trade in precious gems. Convesely, these poems were obviously composed only after the advent of the Roman trade.

The Tamil epic Silappadhikaram has the following to say on the Yavanas:

There was a colony of Yavanas, called Yavanar Irukkai in Kaveripumpattinam in Tanjore district (the ancient Kaberis Emporium of Ptolemy)(5). It was very close to the mount of the river Kaveri. Their colony immediately arrested the sight of passersby. The Yavanas are said to be western people(6). The Yavanas, weilding powerful destructive weapons. The Chera Senkuttuvan ruled over the Yavana country, Himalayas and the southern Kumari(7). The allusion is that he was the master of western, northern and the southern quarters. The term Yavanar Valanadu is employed in the sense of overseas western countries, a

figurative way of expressing his prowess. The Manimekhalai, refers to Yavana artists(8). The palace of the Chola ruler Mavan Killi who conquered Vanci Karur, had an ornamental pavilion constructed by artisans from different regions like Magada, Avanti, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu. Along with them the Yavana sculptors were also employed. Magada artists were experts in gem setting Blacksmiths came from Avanti but the artisans from Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu were simply called expert artists - Kammars and Vinaijnar; their field of expertise is not mentioned. But among the artisans, the Yavanas are specifically mentioned as sculptors Yavana taccar.

The 'Jivaka Cintamani' is a Tamil epic, authored by Thiruttakkadevar(9). Assigned to the 9th cent a.d. it is a Jain work that gives the story of Jivaka and is a work of Pan-Indian character. It has many references to the Yavanas.

A fort was fitted with several mechanical contrivances to hurl weapons on invading enemies. They were also capable of pumping red hot molten metal on the enemies. The gadgets, equal to modern cannons, were made of iron in the shape of boars, snakes, wheels and monkeys and were manned by the Yavanas - Romans(10).

A Roman casket - Yavanappelai is alluded to, containing gold, sparkling gems, pearls, diamonds and corals with which attractive jewellery were made. The casket had an ingenious lid, closed and locked with a spike also made of gold(11).

A gift of two thousand Roman caskets, containing gold and precious gems is mentioned. In this instance also the casket is called Yavanappelai(12). The women kept their lovely and valued silken garments in Roman boxes set with precious gems mani iyal yavana-c-ceppu(13). A betel leaf box, made of cut crystal with its mouth encased in gold and set with pearls, was made by the skilful Roman artisans.

*'Palingu polintu aruhu pon patitta
pattiyil Terinda pon adaippai'(14)*

These are indicative of the preference the high society men and women had for Roman boxes and caskets, which were mainly used for storing precious jewellery, gems and gold. In most cases these are said to be made of crystals.

The Perum Katai(15) is another great epic in Tamil which has survived only in parts. According to scholars, it is a Tamil version of Brhad Katha written in Paisaci language by Gunadhya(16). The Ganga king Durvinita wrote it in Sanskrit(17), and the present Tamil work is said to be based on the Sanskrit text(18). The author of this work, was one Kongu Vel, and the text is essentially a Jaina work. It also reflects Pan Indian traits. There are several references to the work of Yavanas, which were owned as objects of royal status. In most cases, the Yavanas are described as great sculptors, who made artistic products like jewel boxes, lamps in the shape of women etc.

Luxurious jewel boxes, made by the Yavanas containing gold, and jewellery, were brought by beautiful girls and presented to Padmavati(19). A colossal sculpture of a bhuta, made by a Yavana sculptor, had in it built-in gadgets, with which is could capture trespassers(20). Udayana's attendants in the story, brought him, treasures in containers called Aryacceppu, a Roman casket called Yavana mancika and a golden receptacle(21). Luxurious treasures were stored in them. Vasavadatta another character in the story, had a cot of coral set with precious gems, worked by the Yavana artisans(22). An interesting reference calls the Yavana artists as Yavana aryas. They made an exquisite chariot for Vasavadata's mother, which she brought as dowry(23). The yavana artist, in thsi case, are referred to as greatly skilled workers. The chariot had a lotus like seat made of gold, set with precious gems, crystlas, corals and pearls. It was an invaluable vehicle of unparalleled workmanship. That the Yavanas were employed in designing and building Chariots especially, overlaid with gold and set with gems and crystals is frequently alluded to(24).

A specially designed Chariot was made for Vasavadatta, with materials brought from different regions(25). The following materials obtained from different regions dserve notice-sandal wood from Podiyil mountain, ivory from Karnatana forests (Mysore region), gold from the Meru mountain, coral from the western ocean, Pearls from the southern ocean, silver from the Vindhya hills, copper from Sri Lanka (Jaffna), diamonds from the Himalayas, and iron from Kadara (Malaysia - Sumatran regions). Artists from different regions of India, were working on the charriot. Each was prroficient in a particular type of work. The first to be mentioned in the list were the Yavana sculptors. With

them were working blacksmiths from Avanti, gem setters from Magadha, Goldsmiths from Pataliputra, the drawing artists from Kosala, and painters from Vatsa country. The king Pradyotana, gifted to Udayana twenty five chariots constructed by the Yavanas(26).

There were very rich colonies of Yavanas called Yavanceri at Rajagiri(27). The same colonies at another instance are called Yavanappadi(28). Horses presented by the Yavana king ruling overseas country were considered great possessions(29). Indians, both men and women, learned Yavana language. Udayana and the Princess of the Kosala country, communicated with each other through the language of the Yavanas, which others could not understand(30).

The 'Avantisundari Katha', is a Sanskrit text, written by the famous poet Dandin, who lived in the beginning of 7 8th cent. a.d. He refers to a great sculptor-architect named Lalithalaya in the court of the Pallava of Kanchi. Giving his accomplishments, Dandin says, that Lalithalaya excelled even the Yavanas in the art of buildings and sculptures.

Thus both the Tamil and Sanskrit texts from Tamil Nad, speak highly of Yavanas as sculptors and skilled artists, constructing attractive royal chariots and buildings making precious jewel boxes mostly made of gold and gems and charming lamps held by women and also bringing gold from overseas. They were also known for their fearful countenance, violent speeches, and dreadful weapons and were employed by the Tamil kings to guard their forts. They also brought wine in jars which were in demand among the royalty.

It may be mentioned here that among the gold coins found as treasure trove at Vellalur 23 unstruck gold pieces were also found. Obviously they were brought for their metal value. Though no gold coin of the local rulers have been unearthed so far, it is not unlikely that these were brought by the Romans to mint local coins. The recently found inscribed Chera coins suggest they were modelled and minted by the Roman artists. That Roman lamps were actually used in Tamil Nad, is attested by the find of a Roman lamp at Arikamedu.

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 24. *Ibid. p.110.*
 25. *Ibid. p.110*
 26. *Ibid, p. 748*
 27. *Ibid, p. 505*
 28. *Ibid. verse p.505.*
 29. *Ibid. verse p.249.*
 30. *Ibid. verse p.775.*

Impact Of Roman Art



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In the field of sculptural art, the Roman influences is clearly seen in a number of examples. Among the terracotta objects found at Arikamedu(1), a few heads show unquestionable influence of Roman art. The faces are so Roman, it does not require any elaborate discussion to prove their Roman origin. Similarly the moulding technique employed in making them is a borrowing from the Roman world. Some Roman intaglios have been found at Arikamedu. One of the gem found by Jouvean Dubreuil, bore the head of Augustus in intaglio(2). Another intaglio in quartz., also collected from Arikamedu, now in Pondichery, represents Cupid and a bird 'of Gieeko-Roman workmanship'(3). According to Wheeler, 'the gem is untrimmed, and may therefore have been made locally, by a Mediterranean artist'. To this may be added, a fine figure of a lady, holding a mirror, scratched on a potsherd found at Arikamedu, which is influenced by the Roman art(4). Similarly the excavations at Kanchipuram yielded, many terracotta figures(5), made by moulded technique, in the tradition of Roman art.

By far the most remarkable find is the Vellalur hoard, from Coimbatore district(6). As mentioned earlier, the hoard consisted of remarkable jewellery, besides Roman coins in gold. Among the find, the most striking is a gold ring showing a composite figure - representing a sea monster, a dwarf and a face with decorated cap. Such composite figures are found in the Mediterranean region in large numbers, and are in the western museums. The Belgium Royal Cabinet has several such rings, and they are found generally in Roman context(7). The Vellalur hoard, has other rings, with figures carved by Roman artists. A gem with a beautiful horse intaglio is an outstanding representation. Other golden ornaments might have been made by local Indian artists.

Amaravati Art

At this stage we must draw attention to the Buddhist sculptures from Amaravati in Andhradesa(8). The large number of sculptures unearthed at the Buddhist site, are perhaps the earliest sculptures in stone, found in south India. They are assigned to two distinct phases by scholars(9), though many sub phases are also recognised among them. The first phase is the archaic phase, datable to

pre-Christian era and the second phase to first two centuries of the Christian era. It is known that the second phase of Amaravati, what Robert Knox calls the high phase, is almost the perfection of Indian art(10). The art of India, never reached such a perfection at any other time. This refinement should be viewed against the background of Roman contact with the south of India. It is also known that with the discovery of the monsoon wind, the Romans mainly depended on the direct sea route, and reached straight the west coast, particularly the south. Their contact with the south was far more frequent, effective and productive than the land route through north western part of India. Roman impact was more intimate in the south than the north. The Chera Kingdom with Karur as their capital, and Musiris on the west coast, was more frequented by the Romans. Their contact with the Satavahana Kingdom was equally productive(11). If in the pre Christian era, India was greatly influenced by Greek art (Greco Buddhist art) through the land route passing through the North West Frontier passes, in the post Christian era the art trends received great impetus from the Romans but this time from the south. It is against this background Amaravati sculptures deserve study.

The archaic phase of Amaravati depicts sculptural art, in a frontal fashion, flat, somewhat archaic, with heavy garments, turbans etc. But suddenly in the first cent. A.D., the sculptural representation shows a very high classical refinement. The treatment of the body with supple limbs, flowing lines, realistic perspective, and every inch delineated with very high sense of aesthetic taste, it is a sudden outburst of refinement, that every art historian conversant with sculptures has experienced.

Several sculptures of this period also portray Romans side by side with Indians, attending the Royal Court as in the famous court scene(12) now preserved in the Madras Museum, or in the scene of *bahir rishkramana* - preserved in the British Museum. None could mistake these figures as other than the Yavanas or Romans mentioned in the texts. The horse riders portrayed, especially the horses in some scenes recall(13) the Roman horses shown in their sculptures. We have that the Tamil works hold, the horses of the Romans, as great possessions. There could be no doubt that these were carved by Roman artists. Similarly some of the chariots portrayed - and we have noted that Roman artists were constructing Chariots in India as per the

Tamil text noted were undoubtedly influenced by Roman idioms. Sivaramamurti has drawn our attention to the fact, that in some scenes it is the Yavana women who pour wines from impressive jars, a fact also mentioned in Tamil texts(14).

I am convinced that the unprecedented perfection reached by the Amaravati sculptures, in the first two centuries of the Christian era, is mainly due to Roman impact, and were the handiwork of Roman sculptors, the Yavana tacca, working in the south, about which we have copious references in many Tamil and Sanskrit texts. I am sure the Chera Kingdom, with Karur as their capital should have played an important role in this regard.

To sum up, Roman stamped pottery, (arretine ware) and lamps have been found in Tamil Nadu, a point mentioned in Tamil works. That Roman wines were available in Tamil Nadu brought in good vessels, and poured by beautiful women is also seen in sculpture and also the large find of Roman amphora. Romans are known for working in gold jewellery and artistic gems found in Tamil Nadu. That they were constructing chariots mentioned in Tamil works is also seen in sculpture. The Roman horses were far superior is proved both by literature and sculpture. That the Romans were employed as guards, on account of their fighting quality is proved by Tamil literature and Amaravati sculpture. That they were the greatest sculptors is proved by Amaravati art. Thus we find that in every field, in which Romans are mentioned as skillful and adept, in Tamil literature, is proved by the find of actual Roman material (antiquities) and further attested by sculptural representation.

Notes

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5. *Terracottas of Kanchi*.
6. *Vellalur hoard*, 1841, 1891, 1931, 1939.
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12. *Sivaramamurti, C. Ibid., Pl. XXV. 2.*
13. *Ibid., Pl. XLIV.*
14. *Ibid., p. 99.*

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Roman Karur
R. Nagaswamy

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PART - II

Chera Karur

Chera Karuvur (History)

1. Sangam Age

Karuvur, in Trichy district of Tamil Nadu, is repeatedly mentioned in inscriptions and literature by two names, Karur and Vanci. It had other names too: Adipuram, Karuvaipatti, Vancularanyam, Garbhapuram, Bhaskapuram, Viracholapuram, and Shanmangala Kshetram. Among them, the name Adipuram i.e. the first city seems to indicate that it was held as the foremost city by the mediaeval writers. It was also called Vanci mutur, the ancient city of Vanci. In the foreign notices of Ptolem, it was called Karura - an inland capital of the Cheras.

The city is described as a fertile region(1), abounding in paddy fields and cultivating sugarcane, plantains, coconuts, betelnut trees, jack fruits, turmeric, ginger, and vanhi and Konrai flowers. A visitor to the city would see even now these green covering of the fields, though the city has grown to enormous size in the recent fifty years as a great commercial centre, Karur is situated on the banks of Amaravati river, known in ancient times as Anporunai. The river originates from Varahagiri, and joins the great river Kaveri, situated not far away from Karur. The city is connected by rail and bus routes, and is very closely connected with Trichy.

It is difficult to say when it arose to eminence as the capital of the Cheras. A few megalithic urns have been found near this city but their date is more a matter of conjecture(2). We can be sure, that by the time of Asoka Maurya who mentions in his inscription Keralaputras, Karur has become an established city. The archaeological excavation conducted by me at Karur, takes the occupational layers to pre christian era.

Early Epigraphs

Inscriptions and early Sangam literature point to the flourishing state of Karur in the beginning of the Christian era. Inscriptions in the Arnattar hill,(3) (Pukalur) about ten kilometres from Karur, mention a gold merchant from Karur, gifting an abode to a Jaina ascetic on the hill:- Karuvur Ponvanikan Atti attittanam indicating that the city

was a flourishing commercial centre with gold merchants. It was called Karuvur, a name by which it is known to literature (the modern name Karur is a shortened form). It has been noted earlier that the record also mentions three generations of Chera rulers, (1) Ko Adan Cheral Irumporai, (2) his son Perum Kadungo and (3) his son Ilam kadungo, the last gifting a Palli to the Jaina ascetic Cenkayapan of Yarrur. This is a clear pointer to the fact that Karur was the capital of the Cheras. There are also other donative inscriptions in the same place, giving a number of names of the donors and their relatives. Nakan Kiran, Korran, Pittan and Ori. There are other words - Attitanam and Pali. The terms Kayipan (Sanskrit Kasyapan), Attittanam, Vanikan and Pali indicate, that a considerable Prakrit speaking population was residing at karur and by the beginning of first cent. a.d., they got Tamilized, to use, the Prakrit words freely in Tamil records, almost like a manipravala. Two sections of people among them sdeserve special mention the Amanas (Sramanas) Jains monks, and the Vanikas (merchants). Both had northern Indian contacts as indicated by their names. That they were close to the ruling Chera families, is also indicated by the Cheras donating abodes to them. The city of Karuvur, at the turn of the Christian era, already had, a mixed population of Tamil and other language speaking men. That the personal names of donors found in the record, also occur in the Sangam literature need to be noted.

Besides the people from northern India, Karur also had some foreign settlers especially from the western world is proved by the archaeological excavation. Roman amphora, arretine ware and rouletted ware, and the large number of Roman coins-gold and silver, indicate that there was a settlement of Yavanas at Karur at that time.

It has been shown that these findings indicate the presence of Yavanas in Karur in the first two centuries of the Christian era and perhaps even later. It is against this background, we study the references in Sangam literature to Karur and its Chera rulers. The Purananuru(4) Ahananuru(5) Kuruntokai(6) Narrinai(7) and Pattiru Pattu(8) are the early Sangam works that refer to Karur and the Cheras.

Peymakal Ilaveyini, a poetess, has a poem on Karur and the Chera. She says that Vanci on the banks of the cool Porunai river, was a victorious city whose fame was as great as that

of the sky. Young and lovely girls with soft hairs in their fore arms, adorned with jewels played on the sands of the river bank. They created figures and sand houses on the banks, plucked flowers to decorate them and sport in the cool waters of the Porunai river. The king Cheraman Palai Padiya Perumkadungo, (who sang the Palai land) was victorious in the battlefield, by destroying the impregnable forts of the enemies. The Patini woman minstrel, who praised his conquests, received from him, enchanting jewels made of gold Kalanjus. The Bana, who sang along with the Patini, in a perfect synchronising voice, received golden lotuses, fastened to silvr strings'(10). This Puram praises the Chera Perum Kadungo and his capital Vanci, on the banks of Porunai. The old commentator on this poem, mentions that the city was Karuvur of great fame. 'Vanai muttiya Pukalaiyum, Venriyaiym udaiya Karuvur'. The verse also indicates that bards frequented the Chera court at Karur and received golden jewels and flowers.

The Chera Celvak Kadungo Vali Adan, who died at Sikkarpalli, was ruling with Vanci as his capital. The waters of the river An Porunai, skirting his fort were splashing against the walls. There were many fertile villages surrounding Vanci, growing paddy. The Chera Celva Kaungo is praised for his sumptuous gift by the poet kundukat Paliyadan(11). Among the Chera rulers of Sangam age, Chera Senkuttuvan is the most celebrated for his all round contribution. Paranar, the outstanding poet of the Sangam age has sung about this ruler in ten verses in the Pattirru Pattu collection. The king is praised as the ruler of the confluence of the rivers Kaveri Kudavan aru, and Anporunai Cen Kunakku Olukum Kalush Malirnirai Yanriyum puviri punal oru munrudan kudiya kudal anaiyai(12).

The Chera Antuvan Cheral Irumporai was on the balcony of his palace, in the company of the poet Mutamosiyar of Eniccheri, when he saw the chola Muttitalaik Ko Perunar Killi, entering his capital on the back of an elephant. The poet immediately saw that the Chera mistake the Chola and put him to death. So he pointed out that the Chola's elephant, has inadvertently strayed into Karur and not with any malafide intention and that he deserved to be pardoned. A poem to this effect is found in Puram collection(13). It only shows that Karuvur was very near to the capital of the Chola - which was then at Uraiyyur in Trichy.

Ham Cheral Irumporai, another Chera ruler brought the booty he obtained by defeating Palaiyan Maran, to his capital Vanci(14). That the Cheras had their capital at Vanci - Karur is thus often mentioned.

At the same time, it was also frequently captured by the Cholas of Uraiyur. The Chera Yanaikkat cey Mantaran Cheral Irumporai had his capital at Karur. The Pandya ruler Nedun Celian, the victor of Talaiyalankanam, captured and imprisoned his opponents. The Chera Mantaran Cheral was one of those who was thus imprisoned at Madurai. Soon the Chera escaped from the prison, returned to his capital and ascended his throne(15). Even while he was in prison, his enemies were afraid of him. The commentator says that the Pandya could gift even Uraiyur (of the Cholas) and Karur (of the Cheras) thus conforming that Karuvur was the capital of Mantaran.

Another Chola - Nalam Killi also captured Vanci. Vanci is mentioned as Puva Vanci - (Vanci that is not a flower, meaning a city)(16). A third Chola who captured Karur was Killivalavan. The Chera was besieged and never stirred out. The Chola army destroyed the protective forest around Karuvur fort. The trees so cut fell on the sands of An Porunai river. The Poet Alattur Kilar who was an eyewitness to the siege(17) of Karuvur by the Chola gives a description of the war. This siege of Karuvur was seen by another Sangam poet Nappasalaiyar of Marokkam(18). He mentions that 'Karuvur is surrounded by a deep moat with full of water and crocodiles. The Chera is indeed a great ruler, who embossed his royal bow emblem on the lofty Himalayas. He is known for his great chariot. The Chola is now destroying his capital Karuvur, which never witnessed destruction'. The Chera suffered worst defeat in this war.

Imayam cuttiya ema virpori

Manvinai Nedum ter Vanavan tolaiya

Vada Vanci Vattu nin pitu.

Another Chola Killivalavan, who died at Kurappalli, also captured Karuvur(19).

Vanci murram Vayak Kalanaka

Anca marvar atpor Palittuk Kantanai Peruma.

In these poems the Chera capital is called Vanci, which the ancient commentator, invariably mentions at Karuvur.

Thus, Karur continued to be respected as the capital of the Cheras, though it changed hands now and then, the Cholas more often and the Pandya, once invading it. But soon the Chera recaptured it and established his rule.

Poets of Karuvur

Among the Sangam poets, two groups of poets deserve attention (a) those who hailed from Karur and (b) those who sang Karuvur and the ruling Chera. A large number of poets have hailed from Karuvur and their poems are seen in Kuruntokai, Ahananuru, Narrinai, and Purananuru. The following are the poets.

- 1) Karuvur Kilar - Kuruntokai 170.
- 2) Karuvur Kannampalanar - Ahananuru 180, 263, Narrinai 148.
- 3) Karuvur Katappillai Cattamar - Ahananuru 309, Narrinai 343, Puram 168.
- 4) Karuvur Kalingattar - Ahananuru 183.
- 5) Karuvur Kosanar - Narrinai 214.
- 6) Karuvur Cheraman Cattamar - Kuruntokai 268.
- 7) Karuvur Nanmarbanar - Aham 217.
- 8) Karuvur Bhutam Cattamar - Aham 50.
- 9) Karuvur Pauttiranar - Kuruntokai 162.
- 10) Karuvur Perum Catukkattu Bhuta nathanar - Puram 219.

Most of these poets bear decidedly northern names such as Kannan, Cattamar, Kalingattar, Kosan, Bhutan and Pauttiran but are seen eminent Tamil poets, which shows, that northern tradition had become inseparably one with the Tamil life. Even the name of the city Karuvur, is derived according to ancient writers from the Sanskrit term Garbhapuri(20). The Tamil Kings of the Sangam age seemed to have had a fascination for Sanskrit names (as in modern times), and named their capitals as Madhurapuri (modern Madurai), Urugapuri (Uraiyur) and Kanchipuri, Garbhapuri (Karuvur). However these names occur in their Prakrit or Tamilized forms. Another point of great interest is that all of them took the title Karuvur and none claimed Vanci, though they themselves sang Vanci. Among the

poems that extol the Cheras, the Patirru Pattu(21) collection of verses occupies an important position as each group of ten verses is dedicated to one Chera ruler. Besides the exploits of the individual Chera ruler, they furnish a deep insight into the society under the Cheras, which may also be taken to reflect the life all Karur then. While it needs a separate volume to deal with all the information dealt with by these poems, which is beyond the scope of this book, a few essential factors are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Wealth Trading Centres:

The capital of the Chera was full of pearls, corals etc. which came from the coastal regions; gems etc. were obtained from the hill regions, and other objects found their way from the plains and forests. The shoppers street dealing with gold, was distinguished by the fluttering flags.

The main shopping street, where gold freely circulated as a medium of exchange in the Chera capital, was called 'Ponnudai Niyaman'(22) and was obviously very famous. It was called by that name in the reign of two Cheras, by two different poets(23). Palai Gautaman the poet, praising Celkelu Kuttuvan says that the hunters, bartered precious elephant tusks for liquor and also exchanged flesh of deer in the wealthy shopping centres, abounding in gold.

Beautiful Jewels were brought from overseas through the wavy ocean, and were treasured in the store houses (Pandaka salai)(24). The sea yards were full of milk-bushes grown in the coastal region. The Chera country had cool sea coast, sings Kakkai Pattiniyar Naccellaiyar while praising Adukopattu Cheral Adan(25). A point of utmost interest is that lovely jewels were brought in ships and stored in the Chera country(26). The Roman jewellery found in places around Karur, seems to confirm this statement. The warriors of the Cheras, who went on war expedition under the command of the Chera, brought their war booties to the shopping centres and sold them for very high prices. The shopping centre is called niyamam(27).

Imaiyavaramban Nedum Cheeral Adan captured the Yavanas of barbaric words, tied their hands at the back, poured melted butter over their head and seized from them costly jewels including diamonds and brought them to his capital. A part of them were distributed to others who stood by him(28). He is one of the early Cheras and it is to be

noted that he captured jewels and diamonds from the Yavanas - Romans.

Kodumanam a village of the Chera is praised for making jewellery. It is identified with Kodumanal not far away from Karur, where archaeological excavation conducted by me have yielded valuable data. Pandar is another town but situated in the coast under the Cheras, yielded precious pearls. Probably it was a pearl fishery. The pearls of Pandar and the jewels of Kodumanal are frequently referred to. Padiyur(29) is the place from where the Chera obtained his precious jewels which he gifted(30). It looks that these two places exclusively served the royal need.

Brahmadaya

Kumattur Kannanar, a poet of repute sang the praises of Nedum Cheral Adan(31). The Chera honoured him with a gift of Ainurur in Umbarkadu as a Brahmadaya, and a share of his income from his southern territory for 38 years. The gift of villages to Brahmanas as Brahmadayas, and shares of income, which forms part of large land grants in later society was already established in the Chera capital. Further, the territories with numerals attached, like Irattappadi Elarai Ilakkam, Ennayiram etc., known in later periods was also well established under the ancient Cheras as witnessed in the term ainurur (five hundred villages).

The Chera Narmudicceral was celebrated by Kappiyanar in ten poems(32). The Chera gifted 40,00,000 pon (gold pieces - coins) and a share of his own rulership. The term used in the text is pon. It is not known whether it meant a gold coin or gold pieces; probably the tiny gold pieces went by the name pon, a term that was current even in recent past.

The Chera Senkuttuvan gifted the income from Umbarkadu to Parananar, the most celebrated poet of the Sangam age and also his own son Kuttuvan Cheral(33). Probably the entrusted his son in the care of Parananar. Adukotpattuc Cheral Adan, gifted a village in Kuta nadu, along with cows to Brahmins. He was praised by Poetess Naccellaiyar, to whom he gifted nine Ka of gold towards jewels, 10,000 Kanam and kept her by his side. The poetess was a singer and the Chera was pleased to keep her.

Kapilar another great poet of the Sangam age received 100,000 Kanam of gold(34). Besides he went up the hill named Nanra and made a gift to Kanilar all the lands he

named Kanna, and made a gift to Kapilar all the lands he could see from there.

The Chera Perum Cheral Irumporai, gifted 900,000 Kanam gold, and his own throne to the Poet, Arisil Kilar(35). In fact the Chera with his queens stepped aside and gifted the royal palace to the poet, who promptly returned the same.

Ilam Cheral Irumporai, gifted 32,000 Kanam gold, a village, a house site, 10,000 worth of gold jewels, and a share from his royal income to the poet Perum Kunrur Kilar(36).

From all these gifts recorded in Patirru Pattu Patikams, it is seen that the Chera rulers have gifted cows, gold, cultivable lands, and shares of their royal income. It corresponds to Godana, Hiranya dana, and Bhumi dana, made by other Indian rulers, like Satavahanas recorded in Inscriptions. The gift of lands to the temples as Devatana, and to Brahmins as Brahmada was already a popular act of the ruling dynasties of Tamil Nadu in the sangam age.

The Chera rulers followed essentially the Vaidika system and followed in every walk of life, the Hindu tradition of all Indian character.

Concept of Cakravati

They were inspired by the concept of Cakravartin and were addressed by the poets as such. The first of the Chera Imayavaramban Nedum Cheral Adan, followed the Cakravarti dharma, adopted by his ancestors.

*'Ilanku mani midainta Polamkala to tikiri Katalaka
varaippin ippolil mulutu anda nin munrinai mutalvar pola
ninru ni keda nallisai nilaiyi tava aliyaro iv
vulakamodudane'(37).*

Similarly, Imayavaramban's brother - Kuttuvan is also praised for his Cakra - that administered just rule Aram Teri Tikiri(38).

Another Chera Selvak Kadungo Vali Adan is praised by the celebrated poet Kapilar who hails his predecessors as just Cakravartins(39).

Religious Belief

The Cheras adored and worshipped Vishnu, Durga, Muruga and other Gods. The God is called Deviam(40) or Kadavul(41). The people of the Chera country worshipped

Lord Thirumal, who had Sri on his chest, the discus in his hand and the garland of Tulsi. People undertook vows, bathed in waters sounding bells and fasted in the temple of Vishnu(42). It is a reference to ekadasi vrata when people fast. Selvak Kadungo, was a great devotee of Vishnu (Mayavannan), and gifted the village Ohantur as devatana for the worship of the Lord. This village was rich in a special variety of paddy.

The Chera rulers were great devotees of Durga of Ayiraimalai, which is frequently mentioned. Palyanai Selkelu Kuttuvan regularly worshipped the Goddess of Ayirai, as was done by his ancestors(43). Ayirai is mentioned as Kadavul, who was a much dreaded deity. She was offered blood oozing flesh, placed on an ivory seat. The ivory for the seat was obtained from the tusks of elephants of the enemy kings, captured in wars. When the kings were victorious in the battle, they offered bloody sacrifice to Durga, which survived in later times and was called Barani. Such an offering to Durga is known throughout India and is mentioned in the famous Durga Saptta Sati. Ilam Cheral Irumporai, is thus praised(44), for a similar offering to Durga at Ayirai hill. This time, he offered huge quantities of cooked rice, mixed with the blood of slain enemies, when he defeated Nannan. This is a war offering. Hence the Goddess was adored with great fear and attention. The prayer was that the Cheras should rule the world and stand firm for ever, like the lofty Ayiraimalai. The other God that comes in for praise is Muruga, who destroyed the Asura - Surapanma, inside the deep sea(45). The Asura assumed the form of a tree, when he was finally killed. The Chera is compared to Muruga for his conquest in the sea and also cutting the tree. The Chera is said to have cut the Kadamba tree of his enemies.

Brahmins

Brahmins and Brahminical culture were highly respected by the Cheras in their Kingdom. Mention has been made earlier to the gift of Brahmadaya villages to Brahmins. The Brahmins were engaged in learning Vedas, teaching them to others, performing Vedic sacrifices, and helping others to perform the same, making gifts and receiving gifts, which constitute the six essential acts. Such Brahmins were considered righteous Brahmins-arampuri antanar. The Cheras followed their advice. It is also clear that the Brahmins were the advisers to the Cheras on justice (verse

24). The Cheras gifted wealth by pouring water, to the Brahmanas who had mastered the Vedas and were ever engaged in expounding the righteous path. The Cheras made the gifts to them when they had completed the performance of Vedic sacrifices as prescribed in the ritual treatises(46). The Brahmins and others, pursued their respective fields of study without fear in the Chera Kingdom(47).

The Chera Palyanai Selkelu Kuttuvan, who was pleased with the poet Palai Gautaman, promised to give him all the things he wanted(48). Gautaman wanted to ascend svarga-heaven with his wife. The Chera consulted the Brahmins well versed in Yagas and completed nine yagas and at the tenth one, found Gautama and his wife and reached heaven, says the Patikam. The Mimamsakas believed that by performing vedic sacrifices, one would obtain apurva, which would take them to svarga, where they could enjoy all pleasures. The episode mentioned earlier, is a pointer to the deep faith in Svarga and the implicit faith that was prevalent in the Chera country in the Vedic sacrifices.

Vedic Cheras

The Cheras themselves learnt Vedas and performed Vedic sacrifices. They learned the Vedas - the Srauta system - and without failing in their religious observances, performed Vedic sacrifices, to the satisfaction of the Gods(49). They worshipped Gods following the mantra path - (Vaidika mantra path) mantira marabil deivam peni.

One of the important concept of Aryan way of life is the three important Yagnas, Deva, Rishi and Pitri yagnas i.e. the adoration of Devas, Rishis and ancestors. The Cheras are said to perform these three yagnas regularly. It is said that by the performance of Vedic yagas, the Devas were adored; by studying the Vedas the Rishis were praised, and by the offerings to the manes, the ancestors were propitiated.

*Tolaiyak Kolkai curram curra
Velviyil Kadavul arttinai kelvi
uyarnilai yulakattu Aiyer inpuruttial
Vanangiya Cayal Vananga anmai
Ilantunai Putalvarin muiyar peni
Tolkatan irutta velpor anal(50).*

The Chera's queen is frequently compared to Arundati(51) and was the ideal consort, as prescribed in the Sastras. She was the chaste wife, mentioned in the Aryan tradition - Anak karupu. The word Kalpu itself is derived from the Sanskrit tradition - Kalpitam, i.e. that which is enjoined.

The King's war drum, was a personified deity and received ritual bathing and offerings to the recitation of Vedic mantras(52). The manner in which, the drum is first sounded with a stick is exactly the same we find in Agamas, as bheri tadana(53). The presence of Brahmins, Vanikas and professedly Brahminical customs and Vedic sacrifices, indicate the Indianisation, in the court of the Chera at Karur. The presence of northern punch marked coins, the Roman cins, and also other coins, at Karur could now be attributed to the mixed society. The simultaneous circulation of these different coins, is meant for the different sections of the society. The religious symbols - Sula and Chakra shown on a stand, in coins are due to the influence of Saivism and Vaishnavism.

Notes

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27. 27. *Patirru Pattu, 25*

28. 28. *Patirru Pattu, 20*

29. 29. *Patirru Pattu, 67*

30. 30. *Patirru Pattu, 74*

31. 31. *Patirru Pattu, 2nd decad*

32. 32. *Patirru Pattu, Patikam, 2*

33. 33. *Patirru Pattu, Patikam, 5*

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Epic Age: Silappadhikaram



Roman Karur

R. Nagaswamy

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The post Sangam history of the Tamils is reflected in the twin epics Silappadhikaram and Manimekhalai.

Silappadhikaram, the great epic in Tamil is a treasure house of information on the Chera Kingdom and society(1). The erection of a temple to the Goddess Pattini-Kannaki, by the Chera Senkuttuvan, in fact gave him much celebrity and is praised in several other works. We will examine this text, specially its bearing on Karur studies. The date of this text is not settled with any certainty and there are any number of articles about its date. Without entering into those arguments, we would tentatively take the date as around 3rd cent a.d.

It deals with the courtlife of the Chera Senkuttuvan as the King of the Western Country(2) - Kutagar KO and the King of Kolli hills who imprinted the bow, his royal crest on the Himalayas. His capital was Vanci. Senkutuvan had in his court, the purohita called Asan (Sanskrit aharyan), the astrologer called Perum gani (Sanskrit Maha Gani) and ministers called Amaccas (Sanskrit Amatyas)(3).

V.R.R.Dikshitar states 'The Purohita was an important limb of the state and was a member of the state. This reminds us of the status he occupied in the artha sastra polity, where it is said that the arms of the Kshatriya aided by the science of the Brahmana attain success'(4) 'Senkuttuvan was also surrounded by Magada and Sutan the presence of Magadha and the Sutas was a North Indian convention. Their function was to glorify the King in seasoned and ut of season'.

Senkuttuvan was born and ruled the country by the grace of Lord Siva(5)-

*An eru urnton arulinir tonri
manilam vilakkiya mannavan.*

Obviously he was a great Siva Bhakta. This is repeated at another place also, as Senkuttuvan is said to shine by the grace of Siva, the Lord with red matted locks.

*Cenjadai Vanavan arulinil vilanga
Vanci tonriya Vanava(6)*

The first thing he did, as he got up on hearing the morning drum, was to worship Lord Siva and circumambulate his

shrine. He then received fragrant incense, lit by the Vedic Brahmins from the sacrificial altars.

*Kalai murasam Katai mukattelatalum
Nilavukkatir muditta nilirum Cenni
Ulaku Poti uruvattu uyarnton cevati
Maram ver Vanci malaiyodu punaintu
Irainca cenni Irainci Valamkondu(7)*

That this was a custom among the Tamil Kings for centuries may be known from the *ulas Ottakuttan* - 12th cent., in which the Chola King is said to follow the same form of devotion(8). Senkuttuvan also received the blessing of the Brahmins performing Vedic sacrifices. This is an Aryan tradition. When Senkuttuvan went to Himalayas to bring a stone to carve the image of Kannaki, he worshipped Siva as Ardhanarisvara Umai Oru Bhagan(9). He was fond of witnessing dance and the one he witnessed in his court was the Ardhanari episode, which the Cakkiyar performed. All this would indicate, his deep Siva Cakkiyar performed. All this would indicate, his deep Siva Bhakti. He was also a great devotee of Durga of the Ayirai malai(10). But the saivism of that age was the Smarta Vaidika system, which permitted one to adore Siva, Vishnu and all other Vedic Gods and also perform Vedic sacrifices. We find Senkuttuvan likened to Vishnu(11).

In a verse of double entente, Ilango Adigal seems to indicate that Kannaki, was identical with Parvati - Durga(12).

*Malaiyaraiyar peria madappavai tatunai
Nila Arasar nin mudi mel errinan Valiyaro*

Malaiyaraiyan Pavai - stands for Parvati - Durga. It also means Kannaki - for whom a stone was brought from Himalayas.

The worship of Siva and Vishnu, could be seen in the light of coins found in Karur showing trisula and Chakra standard. We have mentioned earlier that the coins found at Karur also indicate the religious faiths of the Chera region.

Senkuttuvan was a follower of Vedic Hinduism. He was a performer of Vedic sacrifices. When he heard the Brahmin Madala - he consulted Brahmins well versed in Vedic sacrifices - Yagas - and commanded his minister to prepare

for the sacrifice, called Velvi Santi. It is obviously a Rajasuya sacrifice, performed with his chief queen called Velvi Kilatti(13). One is empowered to do Vedic sacrifice only in the company of his wife, who is called Patni. The Senkuttuvan followed the advices of Vedic Brahmanas is mentioned in a number of places.

Arumarai marungin arasark ongiya

Perunal velvi ni ceytal vendum

When Madalan the Brahmin narrated the incidents he noticed, Senkuttuvan performed a Tulabhara sacrifice and presented him gold equal to his own weight.

Atakap perunirai anjaintu iratti

*... Tan rirai Madala maraiyon kolka
enru alittu(14).*

The gift of gold to Brahmins should be noted from another angle. The different types of coins - the punch marked coins and punch mark type square coins etc., found in large numbers should be viewed in this light. A question has been raised, whether the punch marked coins, called Puranas were coins from northern India, or local issues? As in north India, Vedic sacrifices were India, or local issues? As in north India, Vedic sacrifices were actively practised under the Cheras some of the coins, could have been brought by the Vedic followers for the dakshina and inspired by that tradition, local issues were also probably minted. This might perhaps explain, why different varieties of coins were in circulation at the same time in Karur! What is suggested here is that this circulation is not only on account of trade but also gifts to Brahmanas. This factor was responsible for a large number of coins being found.

We may also note that the capital of the Chera is again and again mentioned as Vanci on the banks the An porunai. The early commentator on Silappadhikaram, Arum Pada Urai Asiriyar identifies Vanci with Karuvur(15). Vanci is mentioned as a very rich city 'nidhi tuncu viyan nagar'(16) the royal palace is called the golden palace Kanaka malikai, it was decorated with rows of pearl garlands; the seat was covered with gold plates embedded with diamonds and precious gems.

Among Senkuttuvan's exploits, two may be mentioned. He brought a Catukka Bhuta and established it in Vanci. He is

said to have instituted a festival to the Bhta, in which liquor was offered.

*Catukka Butarai Vanciyut tantu
Maduk kok velvi vettonayinum(17).*

It seems the deity mentioned here is the Kshertrapala - to whom Madhu was an important offering.

The other important exploit was one of Senkuttuvan's ancestor is credited with a conquest over Yavanas. The phrase is interesting. It says he was ruling over the Yavana Nadu, the country of the Yavanas meaning, the overseas western countries.

That Vanci was the capital of Senkuttuvan and this is identified with Karur by ancient commentators, certainly locates the events in modern Karur in Trichy district.

Puhal Chola

The history of karur after the epic age is found in the life of puhal Chola narrated in the Periyapuranam. Though the account is legendary, Puhal Chola had to be placed after the epic age. Karur now appears as the capital of the Cholas and a conflict with the Atiya figures in the narration.

Eripattar

Two episodes are connected with Puhal Chola, while he was camping at Karur which was under him then.

The first episode relates to a Siva Bhakta - Eripattar. According to the legend, there lived in Karur, a Siva Bhakta Sivakami Andar whose duty was to collect flowers daily after bathing in the river and supply, to the temple of Pasupatisvara for worship. One day as he was proceeding to the temple with the basket of flowers, the royal elephant which came on the way caught hold of his flower basket, threw it down and stamped it under its feet and moved away. The helpless Sivakami Andar, cried aloud, as his service to Siva was obstructed.

There lived at Karur, another but a staunch Siva Bhakta named Eripattar. He too was a staunch Siva Bhakta, that he would not brook any wrong to Siva devotees. He used to carry an axe with him, and if he noticed any one doing harm to Siva worship, he would cut him off. Eripattar, happened to hear the cries of Sivakami Andar, went after

the royal elephant and chopped off its trunk. The elephant fell dead. Eripattar also killed the rider and three soldiers who accompanied the elephant. The other soldiers, rushed to the Chola King, Puhla Chola, who was camping at Karur then. First he thought, some enemy had entered his capital and killed his royal elephant. When he arrived at the scene, he found this lonely man standing with his axe. On knowing the cause of this act, he felt, the punishment meted out to his elephant was inadequate. As a master of the elephant, he too deserved severe punishment of wronging a Siva Bhakta. He drew his sword, handed it over to Eripattar and asked him to sever his head as a punishment. Eripattar was taken aback by the piety of the king. He felt that he had harmed the king, a great Siva Bhakta, received the sword, and started inflicting punishment on his own self, by cutting his head. Alarmed at this turn of events, the king stopped him. Siva appeared and brought back the elephant and others to life. This is a legend which portrays the supremacy of Siva Bhakti.

Puhla Chola: The second episode connected with this ruler, is his fight with Atiyar. According to the legend, Puhla Chola, once reviewed the tributes he received while seated in his palace at Karur. He was told, Atiyar, who had his hill fort at Kurumporaiyur, had not paid his tributes. The Chola ordered his commanders to invade Kurumporaiyur, and capture Atiyar. The Chola army stormed and captured the fort. The Atiyar ran for his life but the heads of several soldiers rolled on the ground. The victorious Chola army returned with the body of several severed heads of the opponents. When the Chola saw those heads, he found among them, one head with a matted lock. He thought that it was the head of a Siva Bhakta (for it was only the Saivites who had their hair matted). He was shocked to note that he was responsible for the death of a Siva Bhakta. To atone the sin, he immolated himself in fire.

Both Puhla Chola and Eripattar, were adored as saints and were included among the 63 Saivite saints. Karur assumed greater sanctity for Saivite followers as the place of these two Siva bhaktas.

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Pallava Age

Karur From Epigraphical Sources

It has been mentioned earlier that Karur remained the capital of the Cheras from about the 3rd century b.c. to 3rd to 4th cent after the Christian era. It was also noted that occasionally it was captured by the Cholas or the Pandyas. After the epic age, the Cholas of Uraiyur, treated this as their secondary capital, as noticed from the history of Puhar Chola. The history of the Cholas themselves is not very clear subsequent to this period till we come to the mid 9th cent a.d.

Interestingly, some light is shed on the Cholas of Uraiyur by the Western Gangas of Talaikkadu. The Ganga ruler Durvinita, who ruled in the later half of 6th cent a.d., had a Chola princess as his Chief Queen. She is called 'the daughter of the family of Karikala Chola, an exemplary Kshatriya, and ruler of Uraiyur'.

'Uragapuradhipa Parama Kshatriya Chola Kula tilaka Sri dagdha Carana Santana'(1).

Sri Vikrama, the grandson of Ganga Durvinita and who ruled in the 7th cent a.d., also had a Chola Princess as his Queen who is called 'the daughter of the Chola family of Karikala, who raised embankments on either side of the river Kaveri'(2). These references do show that Karikala Chola's family, ruling from Uraiyur, was still recognised as a dynasty powerful enough to be reckoned with.

The Gangas were ruling the northern part of the Kongu and occasionally the south as well. Karur was in the southern Kongu. Some of the Ganga rulers and also the Kadambas of the West, were crowned by the Pallava rulers(3). The Pallavas of Kanchi considered themselves overlords of Gangas, and Kadambas in the 5th and 6th cent. They were gradually expanding towards the south as far as Trichy in the 6th cent a.d. Till then Karur continued to be under the Cheras.

Much credence is given to a text called 'Kongu desa Rajakkal Caritam'(4). The manuscript of this text is in the Madras Government Oriental Manuscript Library. Obviously it is a 19th cent work, when some of the copper plates and historical records began to appear, and the new outlook on history, as per the Western thoughts begin to

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take deep roots. Taking some of the records that have appeared the Kongu desa Rajakkal Caritam waves an apparent history but many of its accounts are not authentic. For example the Kongu desa Rjakkal Caritam says, the Kongu Country was at first ruled by Reddi Kings which is against the known historical records available(5). It mentions the Ganga rulers as the second dynasty to rule the Kongu country.

Some inscriptions of Kandan Ravi(6) and Ravi Kodai(7) are found near Karur. We have seen earlier that two hero stones have been found at Karur. One in Vatteluttu seems to be recorded in the reign of Ravi Kodai. The place of Kandan and Ravi in the Chronology is yet to be precisely determined. The names would indicate Chera origin. In the later half of the 6th century, Simhavishnu captured the region upto Trichy(8). Karur came under the Pallavas. The Atiyaman ruler - Atiyendra, who excavated the two cave temples at Namakkal, a place on the other side of the river Kaveri opposite to Pukalur, seems to have been active in Karur in the beginning of the 8th century(9). He was obviously a subordinate of the Pallavas, as he assumed titles resembling that of Rajasimha Pallava. The cave temple at Tantonri malai is ascribed to him.

In the later half of the 8th cent. Nandi Varman Pallava Malla was at Karur, fighting a severe battle with the Pandya(10). The Pandya Rajasimha Termaran conquered the Kongu Country, defeated the Atiya at Ayiraveli Ayirur and Pukalur, reached Kodumudi, worshipped Pasupati, and proceeded further and conquered the Ganga ruler and married his daughter(11). The events are mentioned in the Velvikkudi copper plates of the Pandyas. Rajasimha Panda captured Karur and strengthened its fortification. He wanted to retain the hold over Karur which is called Vanci in the records. Rajasimha strengthened the fortifications of his own capital Madurai, the fort at Koli - Uraiyur (the ancient capital of the Cholas) and Vanci Karur. This should have taken place around 750 a.d. The annexation of Karur did not last long. Obviously Karur was recaptured by the Pallava Nandi, immediately after its fortification. Thirumangai Alvar, the Vaishnavite Alvar, mentions the battle of Karur(12), between Nandi Varman Pallava and his opponent in which Nandi is credited which victory.

'Kanni mamadil Karuvur Veruva'.

But within a few years, around 770 a.d. Rajasimha's son, Pandya Varaguna I defeated the Pallava at Karur.

*'Kadavanai Karuvuril Kal Kalanka
Kalir Udaitta Kutalar Kon:.(13)*

The fight between the Pandyas and Pallavas continued for long, and several battles were fought mainly on the southern banks of the Kaveri. Karur figures three times in this conflict between 750 and 770 a.d. and was one of the main centres of contention between the two powerful dynasties. The Atiya was on the side of the Pallava in this battle.

The frequent fights, and destruction of the towns - Karur and Uraiyur, exposed their vulnerability, especially when the fight was between the two powerful dynasties. In the first half of the 9th century, the towns were already exhausted and the ruling powers were looking for alternate sites for their seat of power. It may perhaps be one of the reasons for the loss of the strategic importance for Karur and Uraiyur.

In the middle of 9th cent, when Vijayalaya Chola established the Imperial Chola line, he chose Thanjavur as the capital(14). The Cheras had already left Karur. Karur no more figures as an important centre of power in the 9th cent.

In the later half of the 9th cent a.d. Aditya Chola, the son and successor of Vijayalaya, embarked on expanding the Chola empire. He conquered the Kongu country, and brought gold from there and gilded the Chidambaram temple(15). All that we can say of Karur is that it was permanently annexed to the Chola Kingdom.

Inscriptions of the Imperial Cholas are found in and around Karur from the beginning of the 10th cent a.d. from the reign of Parantaka Chola. The 10th cent records mention Karur also as Vanci and the territorial division in which it was located was called as Kongu alias Adhirajaraja Mandalam(16).

Attikkosar

An interesting inscription in Vatteluttu has been found at the out skirts of Karur(17). It reads:-

Sri Kurrantai Kolli niruvan Kala

Kartti Kosamudai Kosamum Aimperumku

Euvum Sangamum itu Kattanadi en talai melina.

The term Atti Kosar is mentioned in the Tamil work Perum Katai(18) in the sense of those who fund and trade in elephants (atti - Sanskrit hasti elephants). It is said that they act as an assembly of members. The commentary of Tolkappiyam Sutra II of Peyar - cites Atti Kosar as a group name. Attikosas were thus of known in the ancient Tamil land. The inscription under reference mentions Kosam twice, first as Atti Kosamudai Kosam - i.e., the Kosas of attikosa; the term Kosa also stands for a building, an inner room. It probably stood for a guarded inner chamber of treasury where money treasures required for trading in Elephants were stored and guarded. The second word stood for the group of members - Kosas, dealing with the elephant trade. Besides elephant traders, the record also mentions Aimperum Kulu and a Sangha.

Two different interpretations of the word Aimperum Kulu are given by ancient commentators. Aimperum Kulu, means the group of five great men. The early commentator on Silappadhikaram(19), in which this word occurs states that this five represents Amaicca (ministers), Purohita (priest), Maruttar (physician), Parppars (Brahmins) and Majanas (representatives of the people). These five are said to be the members of the royal assembly or court. The later commentator, Adiyarkkunallar, mentions Amaiccas, Purohitas, Commanders, Ambassadors and Spies as the group that constitute for five(20). The first two are common to both the list: Maruttar of the early list stands for the personal physician of the king. The second list instead includes the Commanders. The early list mentions Tutuvas (ambassadors), but the later one mentions Parppar (Brahmins). Probably both are identical. Mainly Brahmins were employed in early periods, as ambassadors as sandhi vigrahikas. Lastly the early commentaries include the Mahajanas - the representatives of the people. This is replaced by the Spies by the later list. However it is seen that both lists relate to the assembly of five, attending on the king. Their function is to advice the king on matters of importance. It is not known whether the Aimperum kulu mentioned in the Karur record, relates to the royal assembly. In all probability it did. The record also mentions a Sangha - another group. The record mentions three groups of men - the Kosas, the Aimperumkulu and the Sangha.

It seems the record refers to the establishment of a treasury and the constitution of the three groups, probably by the king. The records also ends up with a prayer that it should be protected.

It is clear that this was a very important foundation and the record was fixed in the building like other lithic records. It also indicates that a great treasury to deal with elephant trade was established at Karur as it was a royal capital. Three groups including the important group - Aimperum Kulu were constituted, shows its importance.

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Altogether 25 inscriptions have been copied from Karur including the two hero stones copied in recent years. Most of the records are dated in the reign of the Cholas. The Imperial Chola records begin to appear from the reign of Parantaka Chola I (940 a.d.) in the region.

At first Kongumandalam was called Vira Chola mandalam and later called Adhirajarama mandalam. Towards the end of 12th cent(1), it came to be called Chola Kerala mandalam. The territorial subdivision in which Karur is located was first called Vangala Nadu, renamed Keralantaka Valanadu, after Rajaraja I in the 11th cent a.d.

From the reign of Rajaraja Chola I, a branch of the Chola family took over the Kongumandalam as administrators. They are known to historians as Kongu Chola dynasty. They seemed to have ruled from 1004 a.d. to 1303 a.d. and issued records in their own names(2). Though they were recognised as independent rulers, they were in effect subordinates of the Imperial Cholas whose records are also found side by side in Karur region.

Most of the records of Karur are found in the Pasupatisvara temple and deal with grants and privileges.

One of the records of Vira Chola(3) found in the Pasupatisvara temple belonged to the Kongu Chola ruler. Among the fully preserved inscriptions of the Chola age from Karur, five of the inscriptions are direct royal involvement, recording orders issued by the Chola emperors relating to Karur. They show the personal interest the kings evinced in Karur, especially the Pasupatisvara temple.

Rajendra Chola II (1054 to 1064 a.d.), issued two orders gifting two villages in 1063 a.d. to the temple of Pasupatisvara, with the stipulation that the proceeds from them were to be utilised for meeting the service expenses of the God. The orders were issued directly by the king. They were drafted, verified, signed and issued by very high ranking royal officials. The presiding deity of the temple was called Thiru Anilai Mahadeva. Karur was situated in Venkala nadu in Adhirajarama mandalam. Among the boundaries mentioned one was called Rajamahendravadi after the name of the Chola Prince. The gift was to cater to the service expenses, and periodical repairs(4).

Virarajendra Chola who was a younger brother of Rajendra succeeded him to the Chola throne. Virarajendra gifted a village, Pakkur near Karur to the Pasupatisvara temple. He made the gift while he was seated in his palace at Gangaikondacholapuram. The village was an agriculturists village, vellanvahai, paying taxes to the king. The king now ordered that the village should be deleted from the register of tax paying agriculturist village and be entered as a temple land. The village was paying earlier 303 kalanju of gold and 3531 kalam of paddy as annual tax. The king now ordered that the tax due to him were to be measured to be temple of Thiru Anilai Mahadeva for services. The orders were drafted, signed and issued by high ranking officials(5).

Three royal grants to the temple within a span of three years shows the attention the place received in the hands of the Chola monarchs.

Around the year 1120 a.d. there seems to have occurred a commotion at karur. It is not known whether it was a political rebellion, or a local commotion(6). The metal images of Nataraja and Sivakami in the Pasupatisvara temple, seem to have been either lost or suffered damage. The temple authorities jointly paid 100 panams (money) and gave 80 new coins in addition, from the temple treasury and arranged for the search and restoration. Provisions were also made for the worship of the image of Nataraja and his consorts, for which ten coins were received by the temple priests. The ten coins are mentioned as Palam Salakai accu bearing Sri Iyakki. Iyakki is a Tamil form for Yakshi. The coin probably bore the figure of a Yakshi. The term Salakai perhaps meant a rectangular piece. Could it then refer to the Sri Lakshmi Coin found at Karur? If it did, then rectangular coins were in use in the Kongu country till the 12th cent. The Lakshmi coin found at Karur is a copper coin but the one mentioned in the Karur Chola seems to be a gold coin. It is not known whether such gold coins were also in circulation.

Towards the ends of the 13th cent., when the Chola power got weakened, the Pandyas of Madurai were showing signs of recovery and aggression. The Pandya and the Kerala rulers entered into an alliance between 1290 and 1295 a.d., and captured some regions from the Chola. The Karur region was lost by the Cholas to the Kerala. Probably Karur was again fortified by the Kerala for it suddenly springs up

into life. The Kongu ruler then was Virachola, whose records are found in the region from 1183 to 1207, with a break between 1190 and 1194 a.d.(5). It is during this period Karur was lost to the Kerala ruler. The Imperial Chola ruler of Tanjore, Kulottunga Chola III was an able ruler. He defeated the Pandya and the Kerala rulers, recaptured, entered the city of Karur triumphantly and performed the Vijayabhisheka as a mark of his conquest. Kulottunga considered this as a very great victory and assumed the significant title - the conqueror of Karur(6)

Mudivalangu Chola Puram

The fierce nature of this war and the progress of achievements are mentioned in detail in Kulottunga's inscription. His triumphant entry into Karur after his signal victory is mentioned as the crowning event of this campaign and so he invariably called himself Kulottunga, the victor of Karur. A dramatic event was enacted in this campaign. When Kulottunga achieved victory he called the vanquished rulers the Pandya and the Chera to his court. He made both the defeated rulers to bow down at his feet, and placed his foot on their crown. Having inflicted this symbolic shame on them, he returned their crown and also their kingdom with the condition that they would rule as his subordinates. He consoled them by inviting them to a feast and made them sit by his side. Kulottunga attached importance not only to his conquest but also his act of returning the crown of the vanquished rulers to commemorate this event he assumed the title MUDIVALANGU CHOLA, i.e. the Chola who returned the crown. This event probably took place at Karur for it was renamed Mudivalangu Chola Puram. After this conquest the Kongumandalam of the Chera was renamed Chola Kerala mandalam, and the Pandya country as Chola Pandya mandalam.

In all subsequent inscriptions Kulottunga proudly announces his conquest of Karur and the Vijayabhisheka he had performed in the city. He assumed another significant title Chola-Kerala to mark this victory. The Kongu country was renamed Chola-Kerala mandalam.(7). He also built a palace at Karur called Chola Keralan Maligai. Karur became once again a prominent political centre, a position it retained till recent times.

Most of the Chola records, found in the Pasupatisvara temple - Karur, relate to land gifts to the temple for worship

and services(8). Two or three of them are interesting. In the year 1200 a.d. Kulottunga gifted 50 velis of land in two villages Kerala Palli and Mannarai as tax free temple lands for defraying worship expenses in the temple Pasupatisvara. The gift was made by the king himself and the deed issued by the king's officers. Karur is now mentioned as Mudivalangu Chola Puram. An interesting stipulation of the deed was that while taking charge of the gifted lands for the temple the arrangements made by the Keralan should be followed. This shows that the Chera ruler herein called Keralan was ruling this region before Kulottunga captured Karur. However he honoured the arrangements made by his enemy ruler.

Two years later another transaction but this time made by the people of the village concerned, is recorded in the reign of the same king. A certain Vettuvan Marutangavelan gifted three gold coins to the Pasupatisvara temple. The village assembly of Tevanapalli received the three coins from the temple treasury for meeting the village expenses. In return they sold a land to the Siva temple 1/40 veli of land, as temple land free of tax. The assembly agreed to use only used water for irrigation and not fresh water.

Referring to the gold coin gifted, the record says it was a minted coin with a stamp tulai nirai cempon. The noble who gifted the gold coin is called Vettuvan. In the south Indian Inscription it has been translated as a hunter which is wrong. Vettuvan is a caste name. The donor was a royal officer as his name mentioned is Marutanga Velan. There are two dominant caste groups in Kongu country even now one is the Vellala and the other is the Vettuva, both being agricultural land holders.

Of the four inscriptions of Kulottunga III, the victor of Karur, in the Pasupatisvara temple, one of them shows that the cultivable lands in Karur were measured by a 12 feet measuring rod. 500 Kulis constituted one ma of land then.

Some special privileges were conferred on groups of people in the 13th cent. a.d. The records were direct orders of the king conferring such titles. The identity of the king is not settled as it gives only the name Konerimai Kondan, a term used to denote the royal order, but not the king's name. One record conferred privileges on the temple servants of Karur that they could blow double conches and beat drums(9) in their marriage and funeral processions. Two storeyed houses could also be built by them with two

doors, and decorate the outside of their houses with garlands of lillies. The other record relates to the privileges conferred on the artisans-Kammalars(10). They were permitted to use double conches, wear sandals and have the walls of their houses plastered. These privileges required royal sanction then.

When the Imperial Chola line of Tanjore, came to an end around 1275 a.d., Karur was captured by the later Pandyas and was under them till the Vijayanagara Empire was established firmly in the region. When the Madurai Nayak kingdom took over as Governors of the region, Karur was ruled by them. The later history of Karur, especially during the colonial period is dealt with in a subsequent chapter.

Notes

1. *Ramachandran Chettiyar, K.M., Ibid., p.181-231.*
2. *South Indian Inscription, Vol.series.*
3. *Rangacharya, V, Ibid., p.1506.*
4. *South Indian Inscriptions, Vol.III, nos.21 & 22.*
5. *South Indian Inscriptions, Vol.III, no.20.*
6. *South Indian Inscriptions, Vol.IV, no.20*
7. *Rangacharya, V. Ibid., p.1506.*
8. *Ramachandra Chettiyar, Ibid, pp.177-245.*
9. *Ibid., p.211-218.*
10. *S.I.I. Vo.IV, 387.*
11. *ARE. No.141 of 1905.*
12. *ARE. No.136 of 1905.*

Sekkilar



Roman Karur

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Among the outstanding poets of the Chola court, Sekkilar the author of Periya Puranam occupies the foremost place(1). While narrating the life of two Siva Bhaktas - Eripattar and Puhai Chola(2), both being natives of Karur, Sekkilar refers to Karur, not as the city of the Cheras but as the ancestral city of the Cholas. Sekkilar served as a minister of the Chola Kulottunga II, in the 12th cent and was greatly devoted to that family. So he calls Karur the ancestral, ancient and great city of Anapaya Chola. The terms Tol Nedum Karuvur speak of Karuvur's greatness as they saw in the 12th cent.

To claim Karur as an ancestral city of the Cholas, is interesting in two ways. There is a persistent tradition recorded in the Tamil poems Palamoli and other works, that Karikala Chola(3), the celebrated ruler of the Sangam age, was kept at Karur as a young boy by his maternal uncle Irumpitar Talaiyar to secure his safety from his enemies. The royal elephant, came from the village, Kalumalam, garlanded him and crowned him as the ruler of the Chola country. Karikala, ascended the Chola throne from Karur. When Sekkilar described Karur as the ancestral city of the Cholas he obviously had this in mind. Similarly Sekkilar calls Karur, the first and foremost city of the Chola family, when narrating the legend of Puhai Chola(4). Sekkilar at another place, outlining the life of Candikesvara, states that five cities had the privilege of crowning the Cholas - Uraiyur. Chidambaram, Seynalur, Karur and Thiruvavur. Among the five, Karur is also one. Though it was the capital of the Cheras, Karur was looked upon as the ancestral home of the Cholas deserves attention.

Notes

1. Periyapuranam, by Sekkilar, several editions have appeared, the reference, in this work, are from the publication of Saiva Siddhanta Mahasamajam, Madras, 1950.
2. Ibid., Verses - 552 and 2957.
3. Ibid, verse 3957.
4. Verse 1218.

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Poet Arunagirinathar, the great composer of Thiruppuhal(1) on Lord Muruga, and a much venerated poet is generally assigned to the 14th cent a.d. as he mentions the Vijayanagara ruler Prauda Devaraya, in one of his poems. He was also a contemporary of one Sambandandan and Somanatha, whom he mentions in his poems. The poet has seven songs in praise of Lord Muruga of Karur. He refers to Karur in all his poems and interestingly, gives different names of the city. Karur was called Karuvur, Vanci, Karuvaipatti and Garbha pura. In one of the verses he refers to it as the Garbha pura of the great Pasupati. Siddha Pasupati Garbhapurattil Arumukap Perumal(2) the importance of the temple of Pasupatisvara is thus brought out. In another he calls it the great Karuvaipatti; Uyar Karuvaipatti(3) it is also called Karuvur of the West; Kutakir Karuvur(4). The Cheras were called Kutanattar in early literature. Some scholars, therefore hold that Vanci, the capital of the Cheras should be located only in the west coast. They also postulate two branches of the Royal family, one having its headquarters on the West coast and the other at Karur. Arunagiri's reference to Karuvur, as the city of West - Kudaku Karuvur, is a clear example, that the modern karuvur region in Trichy district itself was called the western city. The usage 'West' is obviously with reference to the Chola Kingdom which was in the East.

Arunagiri calls the city, in another verse as the victorious and famous Karuvur - Verri Puhall Karuvur(5). The two epithets prefixed to Karur, victorious and famous are of great interest. Mention has been made earlier, that the ancient commentator on Purananuru(6) uses the same epithets Vanai muttiya puhalaikum, venriyaiyum udaiya Karur. There was a persistent tradition of calling the city the victorious and famous Karur for over thousand yers, naturally because of its important role. It is interesting to note that the village Pukalur where the inscriptions of the Sangam age Cheras are found and where the earliest epigraphical reference to Karur appears was called in ancient times as Pukaliyur i.e. the village of fame.

There are two other points mentioned by Arunagiri that deserves attention. Though he was a great devotee of Muruga, his religion was essentially the Saivite system. He therefore prays in one of his Karur poems, to bestow on him Siva Jnana(7) in another he prays that his bondage of

birth - Pasupasa should be removed, which is a Saiva siddhanta doctrine. The reference to the removal of Pasupasa, in the city of Pasupatisvara may be specially noted.

The other points is, Arunagiri gives the pleasures indulged in by the rulers of his time(8). The Partipas, were encircled and saluted by Sancara, Caritas, Nattars from other countries, Mantrikumaras, Padaiyatcis and Sankata Mahipas - the kings in distress. They had palanquins, elephants, horses and royal umbrellas which they considered as great wealth, Sambrama vibhava saubagya. They seat themselves in cushioned spreads, accompanied by chouri bearers, and to the sounding of flutes, pipes and other instruments witness great dances, Peru Natyam performed by women without realising that all these are ephemeral. This description recalls the Mughal court scenes, often seen in paintings, portraying the rulers witnessing dance, and their attachment to dance.

Peru natyam nanamahil partipar, i.e. the kings interesting great dances in their audience hall was the prevalent court life. It is interesting that Arunagiri mentions a group of royal retinue as Padaiyatchi. The commanders - a term used as a caste even now in this region. That Karur was referred to both as Vanci and Karur by Arunagiri may be noted.

Notes

1. *Thiruppugal; several editions have appeared the references here are from Thiruppugal Madani, published by Friends of Thiruppugal, New Delhi, 1991.*
2. *Ibid 9.27*
3. *Ibid v.924.*
4. *Ibid. v.925.*
5. *Ibid v.926*
6. *Puram*
7. *Thiruppugal - Ibid, 923.*
8. *Ibid, 928.*

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The Tamil text Karuvur Puranam(1) is a legendary account of Karur, especially connected with the Siva temple, Pasupatisvara. The name of the author of the text is not known - but its date of composition is given in a verse in the introductory chapter mentioning that it was composed in the year 1540 - saka corresponding to 1618 a.d.

*Muttan niraittu oli Kavinum mulu mati venkutai Sakarar
muri minnir,*

Ittarani purantu atanmel muvainnuru en aintam ellai antil

Antar Pasupati nathar Sannidhanattil arul anbar ketpa

*Uttama narporul Karuvur puranam nilai nirka end
uraittatu anre(2)*

It further says, that the text was a translation into Tamil from the Sanskrit Garbhapuri Puranam. The original is said to be in the Sivakshetra Kanda of Brahma kaivarta Purana. The author seems to have been greatly inspired by the saint Satyajinandarsi and a follower of Meykantar's Saiva system(3)

Besides saluting, at the beginning, Pasupatisvara, Vadivudai Amman and other Gods of the main temple, he pays obeisance to the four Saiva saints. Then he salutes Eripattar, Puhai Cholar and Karuvur Devar who are especially associated with Karur. We have already outlined the episodes connected with Eripattar and Puhai Cholar. Here we examine some significant aspects, found in the text about Karur, and Karuvur Siddhar as it would give the views held by the inhabitants of Karur in the beginning 17th cent. a.d.

The country in which Karur was located is called Kongu nadu, the territory of the Cheras(4). In this region were the sacred Siva sthalas, Perur, Avinasi, bhavani Kudal, Thirucenkodu, Thiru Murugan pundi, and Venka makkudal. To the south of this region was Varahagiri. The river that flows from Varahagiri, was the very grace of Goddess Uma, who made it flow at the command of Lord Siva. So it was known as Amba nai and Amra manadi. As the celestial cow came to Karuvur to do penance on its bank it was also called An porunai. In the city of Karur, the main Siva temple was An nilai, Pasupatisvara but there were five lingas viz. Pasupatisvaram, Kotilingam, Kailasanata, Kariamal Isa and Vanculesa. To the north east of Vanci was

Mukkudal where the confluence of Amaravati, Manimuttaru, and Kaveri rivers takes place. Brahma is said to have married Sarasvati in karur and worshipped Pasupati. He built a temple to Siva? And to its south east a temple for Bhadra with Trisula (Kali) and a temple to Aiyanar Sasta, Brahma also established a chariot resembling a Meru for the festival of Siva which he arranged in the month of Panguni, on a the Uttaram day(5). Among the Rishis - who worshipped Siva, Gautama and Kapila mentioned in the text deserve attention. It may be mentioned, that a Gautama (Palai Gautama) and a Kapila were two of the poets who have sung the Chera rulers in the Patirru Pattu collections.

Among the other legendary figures associated with Karur, this Purana, mentions Mucukunda(6), the monkey faced ruler who is intimately connected with the Tyagaraja temple of Thiruvarur(7), and who brought the worship of Tyagaraja (as Vithi Vitankar) to this world from heaven is said to have been born here in Karur, and after his stay at Thiruvarur returned to Karur and attained salvation. Mucukunda is claimed to be one of the ancestors of the Chola rulers.

A certain Kopitara dhvajan(8) a king born among the Dravidas, incurred the displeasure of sage Agastya, was cursed, and after doing penance at Karur was emancipated. He is another personality, whose identity is lost in legends. Perhaps it is an echo of the name Kodai - a Chera ruler.

The text also gives different names of Karur as Adipuram(9), Karapuram, Bhaskarapuram, Virachola puram, Vancularanyam, Vanci tayur, Shanmangala Kshetram, Karuvur and Garbhapuri. There is an interesting chapter on religious observances, which is essentially Saivite in character(10) and which seems to suggest the Pasupata system mentioned in the Lingapurana(11). The name Pasupatisvara for the presiding Siva of the city may be kept in mind.

There is a chapter solely devoted to the city of Karur as a Sivakshetra, the description of which is highly poetic(12). It states that Pasupati of Karur is sung by the three - a reference to three Saiva saints Appar, Sambandar and Sundarar. At another place in the same chapter(13), it is said that the Tevaram of muvar (the three) are regularly sung at karur, along with the exposition of 18 puranas.

Muvaru purana virutta tokai murr MUVAR Tevaramum

nidu Tapodanar Ceppal Calum.

The life of the four castes - Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Velalar come in for excellent narration(14). The city is said to abound in Vanikas - merchants who acquired enormous wealth and gifted many charities. Describing the Vellalas, the text calls them Tamil Ventar (Tamil Kings). They were the Bhumidevi putras, embodiments of virtue and kindness, cultivating land for sumptuously feeding other people, established the greatness of Meli dhvaja (plough standard in all the directions, destroyed Kali age, wore Kuvalai flowers, and excelled as Velan Talaivars - agriculturists. The poetic description almost echoes in every detail the prasatis of Chiramelinattar found in Chola records. The verse is given below in account of its interest.

*Pumakalukku uriya Thirumatalaiyay utittu
Punniyame uruvaka nanni arul peruki
Mamaraikal uyirkkum uyarkula mutal peyar tam
Vantu Kola k-kuraipada painkulkai iyarri
Ema mani Kuyirru Olivalar meli dhvajam
Entisaiyum niruvi Iravalarkalikal tumittu
Tama narum Kuvalai anintu ulakalittu velan
Talaivar ena nilaviya sir Tamil Ventar Palaral(15)*

It also refers to Brahmins, well versed in Vedas, who wore kundalas in their ears, and whose streets were broad and where festival chariots(16) moved from end to end. The city is said to abound in them. Saiva system was upper most at Karur(17). A point of interest is that the text refers to the pole dancers - Kalaikkuttadikal, who dance on their poles hanging upside down(18).

Karuvur Devar

The last but not the least important legend is that of Karuvur Devar - a siddhar who was a historic personality around whom, fascinating legends were woven(19). Karuvur Devar was a Brahmin, born in Karuvur and learnt Vedas and Sastras. He was a caturvedins, a master of four vedas. He is said to have all branches of knowledge including Lokayata(20) and specially mastered Saivagamas like Kamikagama(21). But he seems to chosen Vama marga, of specially sexual indulgence which was despised by other Brahmins Karuvur tevan Vama nilaittan(22). But he seems to have achieved miraculous powers, which

he demonstrated to others by several ways.

Later Karuvur Tevar is said to have visited several countries like Kannada, Tuluva, Magada, Vaisali, Kosaika, Kosala, Ujjaini, Avanti, Salagramam, Maluvam, Kanauj, Aryam, Marattam, Kurushetram, Latam, Ayodhi, Hemanaam, Gauda desa, Pallavam and Madhya desa(23). These were obviously the sacred kshetra of all Indian nature venerated as such in the 17th century. Later he reached Kedara and Kasi.

Among points of historic interest four or five may be mentioned. The Karuvur devar, a Sivayogi was welcomed by Vaishnavites at Thiru Kuruhur, the place of Nammalvar. He is said to have visited Thiruppudai marudur near Thirunelveli, performed a miracle and sung Thiruvisaippa. This temple has assumed sanctity because of the visit of Karuvur Devar. Interestingly there is a mural painting in the upper tiers of the Gopura here, where the legend of Karuvur Devar's visit is portrayed in a 16th century painting(24). This Purana is nearly contemporaneous with the mural. Karuvur Devar is said to have visited Podiya hill and met the sage Agastya.

The other important event in the life of Karuvur Devar is his visit to Tanjore. According to this legend, the Chola, a great conqueror, constructed a great temple with a lofty gopura, and Sri Koyil that resembled the Meru mountain(25). He wanted to establish Sivalinga as per agamic texts, with the help of Adi saivas. However the ritualists were unable to establish the linga. When they did the ashta bandhana eight fold cementing to the linga, Karuvur Devar, spat upon the cement and the Linga got properly established.

This miracle is mentioned with a great gusto. For this great work, Karuvur Devar is said to have been invited by one Siva Yoga mathar.

The Chola king who built the great temple is called in this text Abhaya(26). There is an 18th cent. Sthala purana of Tanjore, which ascribes the construction of the temple to Kulottunga Chola and a certain sage Haradatta is said to have helped the king to select and establish the Linga in the great temple(27) Abhaya is a name found for Kulottunga Chola. Obviously the Tanjapuri Mahatmya has been inspired by the Karuvur purana in which the name of the Chola who built the great temple of Tanjore appears as

Abhaya. From the 16th cent onwards the legend that a siddha was responsible for the consecration of the great linga of Tanjore was in circulation. The Tamil Tradition assigns it to Karuvur Devar and the later tradition to Haradatta acharya.

Karuvur Devar has sung some songs on the deities of Tanjore, Gangaikondacholapuram etc., which go by the name Thiruvisaippa(28) and are included in the 11th Thirumurai. Karuvur Devar is considered a contemporary of Rajaraja I, 11th cent and one of the Chola paintings in the Tanjore temple is identified with the saint Karuvur Devar, standing by the side of Rajaraja. The other point to be noted is that Karuvur Devar had sang about other temples like Gangaikondacholapuram also but strangely there is no reference to them in Karuvur Puranam.

Karuvur Devar went to Srirangam and went to the house of a call girl and stayed there enjoying her company. To please her with a present he went to the Srirangam temple and requested Lord Ranganatha for wealth. Ranganatha gave him the necklace he was wearing, which Karuvur Devar presented to the public girl. The next day the temple authorities found the necklace of the Lord missing and on enquiry they found it with the public girl. Through her they caught hold of Karuvur Devar and thought he had stolen the necklace. Karuvur Devar called Sri Ranganatha as witness. Lord Ranganatha appeared, according to the legend and deposed that it was gifted by him.

This is clearly the legend connected with Vipranarayana(29) - the Vaishnava Alwar, who is also known as Tondaradippodi. The legend seems to have been superimposed on the life of Karuvur Devar. Probably the proximity of Karur to Srirangam, the fascinating human aspect of the legend, which was popular in the region then, and that Karuvur Devar was a vama margin, all contributed to the superimposition of the Alwar legend on the Saivite Siddhar.

Karuvur Devar's Thiruvisaippa are available, on Chidambaram, Thirukkalantai Adittesvaram, Thiruk Kilkottur Maniambalam, Thiru Mukattalai, Trailokyasundaram, Gangaikondacholesvaram, Thiruppuvanam, Cattiyakkudi, Tanjai Rajarajesvaram, and Thiruvidai Marudur, altogether on ten kshetras. Karuvur puranam, mentions only one place, where Karuvur Devar, sung Thiruvisaippa. This hymn has not come down to us.

Nor do we have one on Karuvur.

That he was a vedic scholar is frequently referred to Cerimarai(30) Tikal Karuvuran, and as one who drinks the honey of Vedas. He also composed the Tamil verses, with the mouth that was reciting Vedas. He calls himself a madman Pittan who utter the Vedas(31). It is a clear pointer to the Pasupata system where the Siva devotee should behave as a madman. This probably led to the legend that he followed the Vamamarga. Thought Karuvur puranam is a mixture of history and legends it throws some welcome light on the city.

Kangumandala Satakam

There are two works in the name of Kongumandala satakam(32) i.e. 100 verses in praise of the Kongu country, one attributed to Valasundara kavi and the other to Karmegha kavi. They both give the legendary and historical events that took place in the Kongu country. They also give the geography, mountains, rivers, cities, sacred pilgrim centres and poets and the episodes connected with them. Similar works on Tondaimandalam, Chola mandalam, and Pandimandalam are also available. Such historical works became the fashion of 17th to 19th cent and are thus valuable sources of history.

The date of Kongumandala satakam(33) by Valasundara Kavirayar is not known but it should have been composed after the 16th cent., as it refers to Immadi Sriranga who fought against the commanders of Achuta Deva Raya, the Vijayanagara ruler, c. 1530 to 1545. As this event was still fresh in the memory of the poet it is not far removed in point of time and probably was composed in the beginning of the 17th cent.

First it locates Vanci the capital of the Chera in modern Karur in Trichy dist Vanchiyil Isan iruppatandro Kongu mandalame(34). Among the mountains it mentions Varahagiri, Kollimalai, Kutakagiri, Nilagiri etc. in the Kongu country. Kaveri, Porunai, Vani, Kanchi, Kutavan aru are the rivers passing through the country. Other points mentioned are 'the Vellals of the Kongu country crowned Cheraman perumal. Karikala Chola as a young boy was crowned as Chola king by the royal elephant as Karur. Cheraman Perumal ascended Kailaya from this country. Kamban who wrote the Ramayana in Tamil was held in great esteem and every one in this land enslaved himself to

the lovely poems of Kamban'.

Notes

1. *Karavur Puranam*, Ed. S.K. Rmarajan and T.V. Ramaswami Pillai, Madras, 2nd Edition, 1984
2. *Ibid*, Payiram, verse 27
3. *Ibid*, Payiram, 21
4. *Ibid*, 1.23
5. *Ibid*, 5.30-32
6. *Ibid*, chapter 10
7. *Ponnuswami, Tyagarajaswami temple, Thiruvarur, Madras, 1967*
8. *K.P., Chapter 13*
9. *K.P., Chapter 17.1*
10. *K.P., Chapter 15, Lingapurana, Ed., Varanasi, Chapter 19.*
11. *K.P., Chapter 11*
12. *K.P., Chapter 17*
13. *K.P., Chapter 17.47*
14. *K.P., Chapter 17.*
15. *K.P., Chapter 17.59*
16. *K.P., Chapter 17.56*
17. *K.P., Chapter 17.54*
18. *K.P., Chapter 17.5*
19. *K.P., Chapter 20*
20. *K.P., Chapter 4*
21. *K. Puranam, Chapter 20, V.S.*
22. *K.P., Chapter 20.10*
23. *K.P., Chpater20.20-22*
24. *South Indian Studies, Ed. R. Nagaswamy, Madras.*
25. *K.P., 20.62-80*
26. *Tanjapuri Mahatmya, TMSS Lib.*
27. *Brhadisvara Mahatmya, (S) Ed. Damodaran, Thanjavur, 1985, p.38*
28. *Thiruvisaippa of Karuvurdevar, in the 9th Thirumurai, (T), Dharmapuram, 1969, pp.54-127.*
29. *Guruparampara prabhavam, (T), by Pimbalagiya Perumal Jiyar, Ed. S. Krishnaswami Aiyangar, Srirangam, 1975, pp.51-62.*
30. *Thiruvisaippa - Ibid, p.86-101.*

31. *Thiruvisaippa*, p. 73 & 95
32. *Kongumahdala satakam*, (T) by
Valasundarakavirayar, Ed. Deivasikhamani Gaunder,
Coimbatore, 1971
33. *Ibid*, verse 69-71
34. *Ibid*, verse 1

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Headquarters of the Taluk and an important Municipality of 12,769 inhabitants, the town stands on the South Indian Railway 48 miles from Trichirapalli and on the bank of the Amaravati river not far from its junction with the Cauvery.

On the establishment of the Vijayanagar empire the region came under their rule. With the Nayaks taking over Madurai as the governors of the region it came to be ruled by them. However Karur was frequently attacked by the Mysore armies. It soon became the most important frontier post as well as a thriving place of business. Under the security of a strong fort and its rule over a rich and extensive region it turned out to be a place of great mercantile resort and opulence.

It is seen that Karur for along with the forts of Aravakkuruchi, Darapuram and Chakragiri played a defensive role. 300 soliders were regularly guarding the fort in the later half of the 18th cent. Palayapattu vamsalvi says that in the time of Haider Ali of Mysone one Vijayavenkatapati Nayak of Arani was the Palayapattu chieftain of Dindukal in which Karur was included. The Dindukal Nayak had to flee for life for siding with the British when Hyder captured it. During his occupancy of Karur the Nayak was paying 1,00,000 arcot rupees as tribute to the British for holding Karur. In turn the British gave him the royal honours equal to that of Newab.

Thereafter the place constantly changed hands. In 1736 Chanda Sahib, when in possession of Tiruchirapalli, besieged it unsuccessfully for several months. In 1760 it was captured by the English in revenge for the assistance which Haider had given to their enemies, the French. Orme described the siege in detail. The expedition was commanded by Capt. Richard Smith and consisted of 50 Europeans, 700 Sepoys, 600 horses, 3000 Kallans. The town was garrisoned by 800 horses, 1000 sepoy and great multitude of Kallans. The English crossed the river in the face of a sharp fire from the Pettah walls on the 19th August, and occupied the Pettah the same day. Siege guns arrived from Trichinopoly on the 23rd and two batteries were completed and opened fire on the morning of the 24th. The approaches were carried nearer and nearer the walls by sapping, till the commandant, apprehensive of this (to him) novel mode of attack, and discussed by the ruin which the

British irregulars were spreading in the neighbourhood, came to terms.

He disavowed any connection with Haider's movements, styling him a rebel against the king of Mysore and he was permitted to evacuate the fort and proceed to Namakkal.

The place was held by the English till 1768, when the British were thoroughly routed by Haider, who recaptured it, during his forward movement at the end of the year. His possession was confirmed by the treaty of 1769. Col. Lang. Attacked Karur again in 1788 in order to distract the attention of Tipu. There is a monument on the south bank of the river to the British who fell in this siege. The town was retained by Tipu of Mysore by the treaty of March 1784. It was captured a 3rd time in 1790 by General Meadows and restored at the peace of 1792. It was taken by Col. Brown on April 5th 1799, just before the general advance of the British on Seringapatnam and since that time was in their possession, first of the Nawab and then of the British. It was garrisoned by the company as a military station until 1801 and portions of the old fort remained till the beginning of this century.

Being on the railway and at the junction of a number of roads, Karur is a centre of considerable trade. Its chief drawback is its crowded site, which is entirely surrounded by Paddy fields and the river, and so cannot easily be extended. The place contains a few industries. About a dozen Seniyans make good women's cloths, the private weaving factory, fitted with modern appliances is mentioned in chapter IV, a few Balijas stamp and dye chintzes, and a very little copper and brass work, painting, wood carving, stone polishing and bangle making, as well as a good deal of mat weaving and basket making are done.

Karur was originally under the district Coimbatre, the ancient Kongunadu, but in the year 1910 was added to Tiruchirapalli district.

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Poetic Karur

A few poems on the Cheras and Vanci rendered into English by the eminent scholar P.N. Appuswamy are given below to give a feel of the poetry that was inspired by Karur.

The following three verses are from Muttollayiram published in 'Kurunci' - Calcutta, 1977.

The Glorious Slush

Joyous Revellers

Pass the drink

To their boon companions:

And these Carousers

Unsteady hands

Spill the liquor;

And those delicious drops

All run together;

And when tall and stately elephants

Tread upon them,

They form a slush

In the heart of VANCI

The city of flowery groves.

The Earth is more Glorious

The heavens are far surpassed

By the earth's loveliness;

like the stars of heaven

Are the early Kings of might;

And as glorius as the Moon

Moving among the stars of heaven

Is he,

The Chera called Kodai

The sovereign lord

Of the people who dwell

On KOLLI Mountain which towers upto heaven (1467-96)

The Vanished Resentment

Let him come here

*If he dare,
The King of the Western country
Lord of VANDI city!
So cried she,
The bright bangled maiden,
And she let all who were near her
Know of her anger,
But, when he came
And she saw him,
On that instant,
All her resentment Fled.*

The following lines on the siege of Karur, are from "The Cholas" by the great historian K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, P.40-42.

'This poem of Kovur Kilar, composed after the king had captured Karuvur, depicts a later stage in his Chera war than another poem by Allatur Kilar, which describes Karuvur still in the stage of siege. Killivalavan is celebrated in eighteen songs by ten different minstrels, and himself and figures as the author of the poem in praise of his friend Pannan, the lord of Sirukudi. He ruled with uraiyur as his capital. This king who possessed considerable ability, was both brave and generous, but somewhat headstrong. Hence a great deal of good advice is in a very tactful way, offered to him by minstrels, and he seems to have been all the better for it. The following lines are by Vellaikkudi makanar, who was rewarded on the spot by a remission of the arrears due on his land.

*The pleasant Tamil lands possess
For boundary the ocean wide.
The heaven, where tempests loud sway not,
Upon their brow rests as a crown.
Fertile the soil they till, and wide.
Three kings with mighty hosts this land
Divide; but of the three; whose drums
Sound for the battle's angry strife,
Thou art the chief, O mighty one!
Though the resplendent sun in diverse quarters rise;
And though the silverly planet to the south decline;
Thy land shall flourish, where through channels deep,*

*Kaveri flows with bright refreshing stream,
 Day long whose banks the sweet cane's white flowers
 wave
 Like the pennon'd spears uprising from the plain
 Let me speak out to this rich country's king!
 Be easy of access at fitting time, as though
 The lord of justice sat together, and right decree
 Such kings have rain on their dominions at their will!
 The clouds thick gather round the sun, and rest
 In vault of heaven: - So let thy canopy
 Of stage challenge the sky, and spread around
 Not gloom, but peaceful shade. Let all thy victories
 Be the toiling ploughman's gain.
 Kings get the blame, whether rains fall, or copious flow,
 And lack the price: such is the usage of the world.
 If thou has marked, known this well,
 Reject wily counsels of malicious men.
 Lighten the load of those who till the soil.
 The dwellers in the land protect. If thy do this
 Thy stubborn foes shall lowly bend beneath thy feet.*

The seige and capture of Karur, the Chera capital, was doubtless, the greatest military achievement of this king, and has called forth a number of poems. Thus Alattur Kilar made an effort to divert the king's attention from his enterprise and save Karur from destruction, by gently reproaching him with pitting himself against a foe unworthy of his mettle:-

*Whether thou wilt destroy or wilt release,
 'Tis thine to ponder which befits thy name!-
 The axe, bright-edged, long-handled, sharp by file
 Of smith black-handed, smites the fragrant boughs
 Of guardian trees in every pace around;
 They crashing fall and scatter the white sands
 Of An-Poruntham river cool, where sport
 The dansels with their golden bracelets gay;
 Thro' town, and at the guarded hall are echoes heard
 And yet their king in pleasure slumbers on!
 With how-armed host, thy war-drum sounding loud,
 Twill shame thee to have fought such feeble foes.*

The intercession was unsuccessful; the fair city fell; and a poetess Marokkattu Nappasalaiyar, gave expression to her grief as follows:

*Thou scion of the Chola Lord who saved
The dove from woe, - chief of the wrathful hosts,
Armed with the gleaming dart that work havoc,
As when a fiery dragon, angry, fierce,-
Bearing five heads, with gleaming poisonous tooth
Has enter'd the vast mountain-cavern, where
The golden creepers twine; - and from the sky
Fire issues forth and loudest thunder bolt;-
Thou saw'st at the lordly city old, whose king
Was circled round by girded elephants.
There in dark deep moat alligators congregate.
In the wide waters of the guarded lake
Are crocodiles that fierce in fight
Dart forth of watchman's ttourch at midnight hour.
Its walls like burnish'd copper shone.
The seemed not fair to thine eyes; for thou didst
Work destruction mightly, glorious king!*

The delicate lyric warning against arrogance addressed to the proud conqueror by Mulam Kilar of Avur must have been composed soon after the capitulation of Karuvur.

Thou art the mightly one, who sparing not the guarded fort broke through and slew its king and made the yellow gold, erstwhile his crown, anklets to grace, O!hero! thy conquering foot.

Thy land is so fertile that a tiny piece thereof, where a she elephant might rest can nourish seven lordly elephants.

That we may ever see, as now, the neck of thy traducers bend, and those who had there raise their heads, be thou, great king! Pleasant of speech, and easy access'.

Kovur Kilar also described this event at some length in a poem which has been preserved in its entirety.